

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

PART TWO

WITHIN A
BUDDING GROVE

*"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past . . ."*

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE is a translation of "A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs", the second part of M. Marcel Proust's continuous novel "A La Recherche du Temps Perdu" (Remembrance of Things Past). The parts already published are :

- I. Du Côté de Chez Swann (1913)
- II. A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs
(awarded the Prix Goncourt in
1919) (1918) ;
- III. Le Côté de Guermantes I (1920)
- IV. Le Côté de Guermantes II }
Sodome et Gomorrhe I } (1921)
- V. Sodome et Gomorrhe II (1922)

The remaining parts will be entitled :

- VII. Albertine Disparue
- VIII. Le Temps Retrouvé

"Du Côté de Chez Swann" has been published in England and America as SWANN'S WAY. A translation of the third and fourth parts, as THE GUERMANTES WAY, is in preparation. SWANN'S WAY is in two volumes at 7s. 6d. net each.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

by

MARCEL PROUST

Translated by

C. K. SCOTT MONCRIEFF

Volume Two



LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS

1923

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Printed in U.S.A.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME TWO

Place-Names: The Place (continued)	page	1
<i>First impressions of M. de Chartus and of Robert de Saint-Loup</i>		
<i>— Dinner with Bloch and his family.</i>		
Seascape, with Frieze of Girls	page	121
<i>Dinners at Rivebelle — Enter Albertine.</i>		

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

PLACE - NAMES: THE PLACE

THE Balbec doctor, who had been called in to cope with a sudden feverish attack, having given the opinion that I ought not to stay out all day on the beach, in the blazing sun, without shelter, and having written out various prescriptions for my use, my grandmother took his prescriptions with a show of respect in which I could at once discern her firm resolve not to have any of them "made up", but did pay attention to his advice on the matter of hygiene, and accepted an offer from Mme. de Villeparisis to take us for drives in her carriage. After this I would spend the mornings, until luncheon, going to and fro between my own room and my grandmother's. Hers did not look out directly upon the sea, as mine did, but was lighted from three of its four sides—with views of a strip of the "front", of a well inside the building, and of the country inland, and was furnished differently from mine, with armchairs upholstered in a metallic tissue with red flowers from which seemed to emanate the cool and pleasant odour that greeted me when I entered the room. And at that hour when the sun's rays, coming from different aspects, and, as it were, from different hours of the day, broke the angles of the wall, thrust in a reflexion of the beach, made of the chest of drawers a festal altar, variegated as a bank of field-flowers, attached to the wall the wings, folded, quivering, warm, of a radiance that would,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

at any moment, resume its flight, warmed like a bath a square of provincial carpet before the window overlooking the well, which the sun festooned and patterned like a climbing vine, added to the charm and complexity of the room's furniture by seeming to pluck and scatter the petals of the silken flowers on the chairs, and to make their silver threads stand out from the fabric, this room in which I lingered for a moment before going to get ready for our drive suggested a prism in which the colours of the light that shone outside were broken up, or a hive in which the sweet juices of the day which I was about to taste were distilled, scattered, intoxicating, visible, a garden of hope which dissolved in a quivering haze of silver threads and rose leaves. But before all this I had drawn back my own curtains, impatient to know what Sea it was that was playing that morning by the shore, like a Nereid. For none of those Seas ever stayed with us longer than a day. On the morrow there would be another, which sometimes resembled its predecessor. But I never saw the same one twice.

There were some that were of so rare a beauty that my pleasure on catching sight of them was enhanced by surprise. By what privilege, on one morning rather than another, did the window on being uncurtained disclose to my wondering eyes the nymph Glauconome, whose lazy beauty, gently breathing, had the transparence of a vaporous emerald beneath whose surface I could see teeming the ponderable elements that coloured it? She made the sun join in her play, with a smile rendered languorous by an invisible haze which was nought but a space kept vacant about her translucent surface, which, thus curtailed, became more appealing, like those goddesses whom the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

sculptor carves in relief upon a block of marble, the rest of which he leaves unchiselled. So, in her matchless colour, she invited us out over those rough terrestrial roads, from which, seated beside Mme. de Villeparisis in her barouche, we should see, all day long and without ever reaching it, the coolness of her gentle palpitation.

Mme. de Villeparisis used to order her carriage early, so that we should have time to reach Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, or the rocks of Quetteholme, or some other goal which, for a somewhat lumbering vehicle, was far enough off to require the whole day. In my joy at the long drive we were going to take I would be humming some tune that I had heard recently as I strolled up and down until Mme. de Villeparisis was ready. If it was Sunday hers would not be the only carriage drawn up outside the hotel ; several hired flies would be waiting there, not only for the people who had been invited to Féterne by Mme. de Cambremer, but for those who, rather than stay at home all day, like children in disgrace, declared that Sunday was always quite impossible at Balbec and started off immediately after luncheon to hide themselves in some neighbouring watering-place or to visit one of the "sights" of the district. And indeed whenever (which was often) anyone asked Mme. Blandais if she had been to the Cambremers', she would answer peremptorily : "No ; we went to the Falls of the Bec," as though that were the sole reason for her not having spent the day at Féterne. And the barrister would be charitable, and say :

"I envy you. I wish I had gone there instead ; they must be well worth seeing."

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Beside the row of carriages, in front of the porch in which I stood waiting, was planted, like some shrub of a rare species, a young page who attracted the eye no less by the unusual and effective colouring of his hair than by his plant-like epidermis. Inside, in the hall, corresponding to the narthex, or Church of the Catechumens in a primitive basilica, through which persons who were not staying in the hotel were entitled to pass, the comrades of this "outside" page did not indeed work much harder than he but did at least execute certain drilled movements. It is probable that in the early morning they helped with the cleaning. But in the afternoon they stood there only like a Chorus who, even when there is nothing for them to do, remain upon the stage in order to strengthen the cast. The General Manager, the same who had so terrified me, reckoned on increasing their number considerably next year, for he had "big ideas". And this prospect greatly afflicted the manager of the hotel, who found that all these boys about the place only "created a nuisance", by which he meant that they got in the visitors' way and were of no use to anyone. But between luncheon and dinner at least, between the exits and entrances of the visitors, they did fill an otherwise empty stage, like those pupils of Mme. de Maintenon who, in the garb of young Israelites, carry on the action whenever Esther or Joad "goes off". But the outside page, with his delicate tints, his tall, slender, fragile trunk, in proximity to whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to come downstairs, preserved an immobility into which a certain melancholy entered, for his elder brothers had left the hotel for more brilliant careers elsewhere, and he felt keenly his isolation upon this alien soil. At last Mme. de Villeparisis ap-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

peared. To stand by her carriage and to help her into it ought perhaps to have been part of the young page's duties. But he knew on the one hand that a person who brings her own servants to an hotel expects them to wait on her and is not as a rule lavish with her "tips", and that generally speaking this was true also of the nobility of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme. de Villeparisis was included in both these categories. The arborescent page concluded therefore that he need expect nothing from her, and leaving her own maid and footman to pack her and her belongings into the carriage, he continued to dream sadly of the enviable lot of his brothers and preserved his vegetable immobility.

We would start off ; some time after rounding the railway station, we came into a country road which soon became as familiar to me as the roads round Combray, from the bend where, like a fish-hook, it was baited with charming orchards, to the turning at which we left it, with tilled fields upon either side. Among these we could see here and there an apple-tree, stripped it was true of its blossom, and bearing no more now than a fringe of pistils, but sufficient even so to enchant me since I could imagine, seeing those inimitable leaves, how their broad expanse, like the ceremonial carpet spread for a wedding that was now over, had been but the other day swept by the white satin train of their blushing flowers.

How often in Paris, during the May of the following year, was I to bring home a branch of apple-blossom from the florist, and to stay all night long before its flowers in which bloomed the same creamy essence that powdered besides and whitened the green unfolding leaves, flowers between whose snowy cups it seemed almost as though

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

it had been the salesman who had, in his generosity towards myself, out of his wealth of invention too and as an effective contrast, added on either side the supplement of a becoming crimson bud : I sat gazing at them, I grouped them in the light of my lamp—for so long that I was often still there when the dawn brought to their whiteness the same flush with which it must at that moment have been tingeing their sisters on the Balbec road—and I sought to carry them back in my imagination to that roadside, to multiply them, to spread them out, so as to fill the frame prepared for them, on the canvas, all ready, of those closes the outline of which I knew by heart, which I so longed to see—which one day I must see again, at the moment when, with the exquisite fervour of genius, spring was covering their canvas with its colours.

Before getting into the carriage I had composed the seascape for which I was going to look out, which I had hoped to see with the “sun radiant”, upon it, and which at Balbec I could distinguish only in too fragmentary a form, broken by so many vulgar intrusions that had no place in my dream, bathers, dressing-boxes, pleasure yachts. But when, Mme. de Villeparisis’s carriage having reached high ground, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set the sea, as it were, apart from nature and history disappeared, and I could as I looked down towards its waves make myself realise that they were the same which Leconte de Lisle describes for us in his *Orestie*, where “like a flight of birds of prey, before the dawn of day” the long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas “with oars an hundred thousand sweep the huge resounding deep.” But on the other hand

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

I was no longer near enough to the sea which seemed to me not a living thing now, but fixed; I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture among the leaves, through which it appeared as inconsistent as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

Mme. de Villeparisis, seeing that I was fond of churches, promised me that we should visit one one day and another another, and especially the church at Carqueville "quite buried in all its old ivy", as she said with a wave of the hand which seemed tastefully to be clothing the absent front in an invisible and delicate screen of foliage. Mme. de Villeparisis would often, with this little descriptive gesture, find just the right word to define the attraction and the distinctive features of an historic building, always avoiding technical terms, but incapable of concealing her thorough understanding of the things to which she referred. She appeared to seek an excuse for this erudition in the fact that one of her father's country houses, the one in which she had lived as a girl, was situated in a district in which there were churches similar in style to those round Balbec, so that it would have been unaccountable if she had not acquired a taste for architecture, this house being, incidentally, one of the finest examples of that of the Renaissance. But as it was also a regular museum, as moreover Chopin and Liszt had played there, Lamartine recited poetry, all the most famous artists for fully a century had inscribed "sentiments", scored melodies, made sketches in the family album, Mme. de Villeparisis ascribed, whether from delicacy, good breeding, true modesty or want of intelligence, only this purely material origin to her acquaintance with all the arts, and had come, apparently, to regard painting, music, literature and philos-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ophy as the appanage of a young lady brought up on the most aristocratic lines in an historic building that was catalogued and starred. You would have said, listening to her, that she knew of no pictures that were not *heir-looms*. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a necklace which she wore, and which fell over her dress. It appeared in the portrait of an ancestress of her own by Titian which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine. She would not listen to a word about pictures bought, heaven knew where, by a Croesus, she was convinced before you spoke that they were forgeries, and had no desire to see them. We knew that she herself painted flowers in water-colour, and my grandmother, who had heard these praised, spoke to her of them. Mme. de Villeparisis modestly changed the subject, but without shewing either surprise or pleasure more than would an artist whose reputation was established and to whom compliments meant nothing. She said merely that it was a delightful pastime because, even if the flowers that sprang from the brush were nothing wonderful, at least the work made you live in the company of real flowers, of the beauty of which, especially when you were obliged to study them closely in order to draw them, you could never grow tired. But at Balbec Mme. de Villeparisis was giving herself a holiday, so as to spare her eyes.

We were astonished, my grandmother and I, to find how much more "Liberal" she was than even the majority of the middle class. She did not understand how anyone could be scandalised by the expulsion of the Jesuits, saying that it had always been done, even under the Monarchy, in Spain even. She took up the defence

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of the Republic, and against its anti-clericalism had no more to say than : "I should^d be equally annoyed whether they prevented me from hearing mass when I wanted to, or forced me to hear it when I didn't !" and even startled us with such utterances as : "Oh ! the aristocracy in these days, what does it amount to ?" "To my mind, a man who doesn't work doesn't count !" —perhaps only because she felt that they gained point and flavour, became memorable, in fact, on her lips.

When we heard these advanced opinions—though never so far advanced as to amount to Socialism, which Mme. de Villeparisis held in abhorrence—expressed so frequently and with so much frankness precisely by one of those people in consideration of whose intelligence our scrupulous and timid impartiality would refuse to condemn outright the ideas of the Conservatives, we came very near, my grandmother and I, to believing that in the pleasant companion of our drives was to be found the measure and the pattern of truth in all things. We took her word for it when she appreciated her Titians, the colonnade of her country house, the conversational talent of Louis-Philippe. But—like those mines of learning who hold us spell-bound when we get them upon Egyptian paintings or Etruscan inscriptions, and yet talk so tediously about modern work that we ask ourselves whether we have not been over-estimating the interest of the sciences in which they are versed since there is not apparent in their treatment of them the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to those studies just as much as to their fatuous essays on Baudelaire—Mme. de Villeparisis, questioned by me about Chateaubriand, about Balzac, about Victor Hugo, each of whom had in his day been the guest of her

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

parents, and had been seen and spoken to by her, smiled at my reverence, told amusing anecdotes of them, such as she had a moment ago been telling us of dukes and statesmen, and severely criticised those writers simply because they had been lacking in that modesty, that self-effacement, that sober art which is satisfied with a single right line, and lays no stress on it, which avoids more than anything else the absurdity of grandiloquence, in that opportuneness, those qualities of moderation, of judgment and simplicity to which she had been taught that real greatness aspired and attained : it was evident that she had no hesitation in placing above them men who might after all, perhaps, by virtue of those qualities, have had the advantage of a Balzac, a Hugo, a Vigny in a drawing-room, an academy, a cabinet council, men like Molé, Fontanes, Vitrolles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy or Daru.

“Like those novels of Stendhal, which you seem to admire. You would have given him a great surprise, I assure you, if you had spoken to him in that tone. My father, who used to meet him at M. Mérimée’s—now he was a man of talent, if you like—often told me that Beyle (that was his real name) was appallingly vulgar, but quite good company at dinner, and never in the least conceited about his books. Why, you can see for yourself how he just shrugged his shoulders at the absurdly extravagant compliments of M. de Balzac. There at least he shewed that he knew how to behave like a gentleman.” She possessed the autographs of all these great men, and seemed, when she put forward the personal relations which her family had had with them, to assume that her judgment of them must be better founded than that of young

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

people who, like myself, had had no opportunity of meeting them. "I'm sure I have a right to speak, for they used to come to my father's house; and as M. Sainte-Beuve, who was a most intelligent man, used to say, in forming an estimate you must take the word of people who saw them close, and were able to judge more exactly of their real worth."

Sometimes as the carriage laboured up a steep road through tilled country, making the fields more real, adding to them a mark of authenticity like the precious flower with which certain of the old masters used to sign their pictures, a few hesitating cornflowers, like the Combray cornflowers, would stream in our wake. Presently the horses outdistanced them, but a little way on we would catch sight of another which while it stayed our coming had pricked up to welcome us amid the grass its azure star; some made so bold as to come and plant themselves by the side of the road, and the impression left in my mind was a nebulous blend of distant memories and of wild flowers grown tame.

We began to go down hill; and then met, climbing on foot, on a bicycle, in a cart or carriage, one of those creatures—flowers of a fine day but unlike the flowers of the field, for each of them secretes something that is not to be found in another, with the result that we can never satisfy upon any of her fellows the desire which she has brought to birth in us—a farm-girl driving her cow or half-lying along a waggon, a shopkeeper's daughter taking the air, a fashionable young lady erect on the back seat of a landau, facing her parents. Certainly Bloch had been the means of opening a new era and had altered the value of life for me on the day when he had told me that the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

dreams which I had entertained on my solitary walks along the Méséglise way, when I hoped that some peasant girl might pass whom I could take in my arms, were not a mere fantasy which corresponded to nothing outside myself, but that all the girls one met, whether villagers or "young ladies", were alike ready and willing to give ear to such prayers. And even if I were fated, now that I was ill and did not go out by myself, never to be able to make love to them, I was happy all the same, like a child born in a prison or a hospital, who, having always supposed that the human organism was capable of digesting only dry bread and "physic", has learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. Even if his gaoler or his nurse does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement. For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourself there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised. And we think with more joy of a life in which (on condition that we eliminate for a moment from our mind the tiny obstacle, accidental and special, which prevents us personally from doing so), we can imagine ourself to be assuaging that desire. As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting.

Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage moved fast. Scarcely had I time to see the girl who was coming in our direction; and yet—as the beauty of people is not like the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

beauty of things, as we feel that it is that of an unique creature, endowed with consciousness and free-will—as soon as her individuality, a soul still vague, a will unknown to me, presented a tiny picture of itself, enormously reduced but complete, in the depths of her indifferent eyes, at once, by a mysterious response of the pollen ready in me for the pistils that should receive it, I felt surging through me the embryo, as vague, as minute, of the desire not to let this girl pass without forcing her mind to become conscious of my person, without preventing her desires from wandering to some one else, without coming to fix myself in her dreams and to seize and occupy her heart. Meanwhile our carriage rolled away from her, the pretty girl was already left behind, and as she had—of me—none of those notions which constitute a person in one's mind, her eyes which had barely seen me had forgotten me already. Was it because I had caught but a fragmentary glimpse of her that I had found her so attractive? It may have been. In the first place, the impossibility of stopping when I came to her, the risk of not meeting her again another day, give at once to such a girl the same charm as a place derives from the illness or poverty that prevents us from visiting it, or the so unadventurous days through which we should otherwise have to live from the battle in which we shall doubtless fall. So that, if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who would at every moment be threatened with death—that is to say, to all mankind. Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we may not possess, its flight is not limited by a reality completely perceived, in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage. If only night is falling and the carriage is moving fast, whether in town or country, there is not a female torso, mutilated like an antique marble by the speed that tears us away and the dusk that drowns it, but aims at our heart, from every turning in the road, from the lighted interior of every shop, the arrows of Beauty, that Beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination over-stimulated by regret.

Had I been free to stop, to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, should I perhaps have been disillusioned by some fault in her complexion which from the carriage I had not distinguished? (After which every effort to penetrate into her life would have seemed suddenly impossible. For beauty is a sequence of hypotheses which ugliness cuts short when it bars the way that we could already see opening into the unknown.) Perhaps a single word which she might have uttered, a smile would have furnished me with a key, a clue that I had not expected, to read the expression of her face, to interpret her bearing, which would at once have ceased to be of any interest. It is possible, for I have never in real life met any girls so desirable as on days when I was with some serious person from whom, despite the myriad pretexts that I invented, I could not tear myself away : some years after that in which I went for the first time to Balbec, as I was driving through Paris with a friend of my father, and had caught sight of a woman walking quickly along the dark street, I felt that it was unreasonable to forfeit, for a purely conventional scruple,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

my share of happiness in what may very well be the only life there is, and jumping from the carriage without a word of apology I followed in quest of the stranger ; lost her where two streets crossed ; caught her up again in a third, and arrived at last, breathless, beneath a street lamp, face to face with old Mme. Verdurin whom I had been carefully avoiding for years, and who, in her delight and surprise, exclaimed : “ But how very nice of you to have run all this way just to say how d’ye do to me ! ”

That year at Balbec, at the moments of such encounters, I would assure my grandmother and Mme. de Villeparisis that I had so severe a headache that the best thing for me would be to go home alone on foot. But they would never let me get out of the carriage. And I must add that the pretty girl (far harder to find again than an historic building, for she was nameless and had the power of locomotion) to the collection of all those whom I promised myself that I would examine more closely at a later date. One of them, however, happened to pass more than once before my eyes in circumstances which allowed me to believe that I should be able to get to know her when I chose. This was a milk-girl who came from a farm with an additional supply of cream for the hotel. I fancied that she had recognised me also ; and she did, in fact, look at me with an attentiveness which was perhaps due only to the surprise which my attentiveness caused her. And next day, a day on which I had been resting all morning, when Françoise came in about noon to draw my curtains, she handed me a letter which had been left for me downstairs. I knew no one at Balbec. I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte who, as he happened to be passing,

REMEMBRANCE 'OF THINGS PAST

had tried to see me, but on hearing that I was asleep had scribbled a few charming lines for which the lift-boy had addressed an envelope which I had supposed to have been written by the milk-girl. I was bitterly disappointed, and the thought that it was more difficult, and more flattering to myself to get a letter from Bergotte did not in the least console me for this particular letter's not being from her. As for the girl, I never came across her again any more than I came across those whom I had seen only from Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage. Seeing and then losing them all thus increased the state of agitation in which I was living, and I found a certain wisdom in the philosophers who recommend us to set a limit to our desires (if, that is, they refer to our desire for people, for that is the only kind that ends in anxiety, having for its object a being at once unknown and unconscious. To suppose that philosophy could refer to the desire for wealth would be too silly.) At the same time I was inclined to regard this wisdom as incomplete, for I said to myself that these encounters made me find even more beautiful a world which thus caused to grow along all the country roads flowers at once rare and common, fleeting treasures of the day, windfalls of the drive, of which the contingent circumstances that would never, perhaps, recur had alone prevented me from taking advantage, and which gave a new zest to life.

But perhaps in hoping that, one day, with greater freedom, I should be able to find on other roads girls much the same, I was already beginning to falsify and corrupt what there is exclusively individual in the desire to live in the company of a woman whom one has found attractive,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

and by the mere fact that I admitted the possibility of making this desire grow artificially; I had implicitly acknowledged my illusion.

The day on which Mme. de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville, where there was that church, covered in ivy, of which she had spoken to us, a church that, built upon rising ground, dominated both its village and the river that flowed beneath it, and had kept its own little bridge from the middle ages, my grandmother, thinking that I would like to be left alone to study the building at my leisure, suggested to her friend that they should go on and wait for me at the pastry-cook's, in the village square which was clearly visible from where we were and, in its mellow bloom in the sunshine, seemed like another part of a whole that was all mediaeval. It was arranged that I should join them there later. In the mass of verdure before which I was left standing I was obliged, if I was to discover the church, to make a mental effort which involved my grasping more intensely the idea "Church"; in fact, as happens to schoolboys who gather more fully the meaning of a sentence when they are made, by translating or by paraphrasing it, to divest it of the forms to which they are accustomed, this idea of "Church", which as a rule I scarcely needed when I stood beneath steeples that were recognisable in themselves, I was obliged perpetually to recall so as not to forget, here that the arch in this clump of ivy was that of a pointed window, there that the projection of the leaves was due to the swelling underneath of a capital. Then came a breath of wind, and sent a tremor through the mobile porch, which was overrun by eddies that shot and quivered like a flood of

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

light ; the pointed leaves opened one against another ; and, shuddering, the arboreal front drew after it green pillars, undulant, caressed and fugitive.

As I came away from the church I saw by the old bridge a cluster of girls from the village who, probably because it was Sunday, were standing about in their best clothes, rallying the young men who went past. Not so well dressed as the others, but seeming to enjoy some ascendancy over them—for she scarcely answered when they spoke to her—with a more serious and a more determined air, there was a tall one who, hoisted upon the parapet of the bridge with her feet hanging down, was holding on her lap a small vessel full of fish which she had presumably just been catching. She had a tanned complexion, gentle eyes but with a look of contempt for her surroundings, a small nose, delicately and attractively modelled. My eyes rested upon her skin ; and my lips, had the need arisen, might have believed that they had followed my eyes. But it was not only to her body that I should have liked to attain, there was also her person, which abode within her, and with which there is but one form of contact, namely to attract its attention, but one sort of penetration, to awaken an idea in it.

And this inner self of the charming fisher-girl seemed to be still closed to me, I was doubtful whether I had entered it, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflect itself in the twin mirrors of her gaze, following an index of refraction that was as unknown to me as if I had been placed in the field of vision of a deer. But just as it would not have sufficed that my lips should find pleasure in hers without giving pleasure to them also, so I should have wished that the idea of me which was to en-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

ter this creature, was to fasten itself in her, should attract to me not merely her attention but her admiration, her desire, and should compel her to keep me in her memory until the day when I should be able to meet her again. Meanwhile I could see, within a stone's-throw, the square in which Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage must be waiting for me. I had not a moment to lose ; and already I could feel that the girls were beginning to laugh at the sight of me thus held suspended before them. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket. I drew it out, and, before explaining to the girl the errand on which I proposed to send her, so as to have a better chance of her listening to me, I held the coin for a moment before her eyes :

"Since you seem to belong to the place," I said to her, "I wonder if you would be so good as to take a message for me. I want you to go to a pastry-cook's—which is apparently in a square, but I don't know where that is—where there is a carriage waiting for me. One moment ! To make quite sure, will you ask if the carriage belongs to the Marquise de Villeparisis ? But you can't miss it ; it's a carriage and pair."

That was what I wished her to know, so that she should regard me as someone of importance. But when I had uttered the words "Marquise" and "carriage and pair", suddenly I had a great sense of calm. I felt that the fisher-girl would remember me, and I felt vanishing, with my fear of not being able to meet her again, part also of my desire to meet her. It seemed to me that I had succeeded in touching her person with invisible lips, and that I had pleased her. And this assault and capture of her mind, this immaterial possession had taken from her part of her mystery, just as physical possession does.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

We came down towards Hudimesnil ; suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray ; happiness analogous to that which had been given me by—among other things—the steeples of Martinville. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just seen, standing a little way back from the steep ridge over which we were passing, three trees, probably marking the entrance to a shady avenue, which made a pattern at which I was looking now not for the first time ; I could not succeed in reconstructing the place from which they had been, as it were, detached, but I felt that it had been familiar to me once ; so that my mind having wavered between some distant year and the present moment, Balbec and its surroundings began to dissolve and I asked myself whether the whole of this drive were not a make-believe, Balbec a place to which I had never gone save in imagination, Mme. de Villeparisis a character in a story and the three old trees the reality which one recaptures on raising one's eyes from the book which one has been reading and which describes an environment into which one has come to believe that one has been bodily transported.

I looked at the three trees ; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it had not grasped, as when things are placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm's-length, can only touch for a moment their outer surface, and can take hold of nothing. Then we rest for a little while before thrusting out our arm with refreshed vigour, and trying to reach an inch or two farther. But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather strength, I should have to be alone. What would I not have given to be able to

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

escape as I used to do on those walks along the Guer-
mantes way, when I detached myself from my parents !
It seemed indeed that I ought to do so now. I recognised
that kind of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain
effort on the part of the mind, but in comparison with
which the attractions of the inertia which inclines us to
renounce that pleasure seem very slight. That pleasure,
the object of which I could but dimly feel, that pleasure
which I must create for myself, I experienced only on
rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that
the things which had happened in the interval were of but
scant importance, and that in attaching myself to the
reality of that pleasure alone I could at length begin to
lead a new life. I laid my hand for a moment across my
eyes, so as to be able to shut them without Mme. de
Villeparisis's noticing. I sat there, thinking of nothing,
then with my thoughts collected, compressed and strengthened I sprang farther forward in the direction of the trees,
or rather in that inverse direction at the end of which I
could see them growing within myself. I felt again be-
hind them the same object, known to me and yet vague,
which I could not bring nearer. And yet all three of
them, as the carriage moved on, I could see coming to-
wards me. Where had I looked at them before ? There
was no place near Combray where an avenue opened off
the road like that. The site which they recalled to me,
there was no room for it either in the scenery of the place
in Germany where I had gone one year with my grand-
mother to take the waters. Was I to suppose, then, that
they came from years already so remote in my life that
the landscape which accompanied them had been en-
tirely obliterated from my memory, and that, like the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

pages which, with sudden emotion, we recognise in a book which we imagined that we had never read, they surged up by themselves out of the forgotten chapter of my earliest infancy? Were they not rather to be numbered among those dream landscapes, always the same, at least for me in whom their unfamiliar aspect was but the objectivation in my dreams of the effort that I had been making while awake either to penetrate the mystery of a place beneath the outward appearance of which I was dimly conscious of there being something more, as had so often happened to me on the Guermantes way, or to succeed in bringing mystery back to a place which I had longed to know and which, from the day on which I had come to know it, had seemed to me to be wholly superficial, like Balbec? Or were they but an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so altered that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant? Or had I indeed never seen them before; did they conceal beneath their surface, like the trees, like the tufts of grass that I had seen beside the Guermantes way, a meaning as obscure, as hard to grasp as is a distant past, so that, whereas they were pleading with me that I would master a new idea, I imagined that I had to identify something in my memory? Or again were they concealing no hidden thought, and was it simply my strained vision that made me see them double in time as one occasionally sees things double in space? I could not tell. And yet all the time they were coming towards me; perhaps some fabulous apparition, a ring of witches or of norns who would propound their oracles to me. I chose rather to believe that they were phantoms of the past, dear companions of my childhood, vanished friends

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

who recalled our common memories. Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life. In their simple, passionate gesticulation I could discern the helpless anguish of a beloved person who has lost the power of speech, and feels that he will never be able to say to us what he wishes to say and we can never guess. Presently, at a cross-roads, the carriage left them. It was bearing me away from what alone I believed to be true, what would have made me truly happy ; it was like my life.

I watched the trees gradually withdraw, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me : "What you fail to learn from us to-day, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will fall for ever into the abyss." And indeed if, in the course of time, I did discover the kind of pleasure and of disturbance which I had just been feeling once again, and if one evening—too late, but then for all time—I fastened myself to it, of those trees themselves I was never to know what they had been trying to give me nor where else I had seen them. And when, the road having forked and the carriage with it, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, with Mme. de Villeparisis asking me what I was dreaming about, I was as wretched as though I had just lost a friend, had died myself, had broken faith with the dead or had denied my God.

It was time to be thinking of home. Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, colder than that of my grandmother but capable of recognising, even outside museums and noblemen's houses, the simple and

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

majestic beauty of certain old and venerable things, told her coachman to take us back by the old Balbec road, a road little used but planted with old elm-trees which we thought quite admirable.

Once we had got to know this road, for a change we would return—that is, if we had not taken it on the outward journey—by another which ran through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the numberless birds that took up one another's song close beside us in the trees gave me the same sense of being at rest that one has when one shuts one's eyes. Chained to my back-seat like Prometheus on his rock I listened to my Oceanides. And when it so happened that I caught a glimpse of one of those birds as it passed from one leaf to another, there was so little apparent connexion between it and the songs that I heard that I could not believe that I was beholding their cause in that little body, fluttering, startled and unseeing.

This road was like many others of the same kind which are to be found in France, climbing on a fairly steep gradient to its summit and then gradually falling for the rest of the way. At the time, I found no great attraction in it, I was only glad to be going home. But it became for me later on a frequent source of joy by remaining in my memory as a lodestone to which all the similar roads that I was to take, on walks or drives or journeys, would at once attach themselves without breach of continuity and would be able, thanks to it, to communicate directly with my heart. For as soon as the carriage or the motor-car turned into one of these roads that seemed to be merely the continuation of the road along which I had driven with Mme. de Villeparisis, the matter to which I found

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

my consciousness directly applying itself, as to the most recent event in my past, would be (all the intervening years being quietly obliterated) the impressions that I had had on those bright summer afternoons and evenings, driving round Balbec, when the leaves smelt good, a mist rose from the ground, and beyond the village close at hand one could see through the trees the sun setting as though it had been merely some place farther along the road, a forest place and distant, which we should not have time to reach that evening. Harmonised with what I was feeling now in another place, on a similar road, surrounded by all the accessory sensations of breathing deep draughts of air, of curiosity, indolence, appetite, lightness of heart which were common to them both, and excluding all others, these impressions would be reinforced, would take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, and almost of a setting of life which, as it happened, I rarely had the luck to come across, but in which these awakened memories placed, amid the reality that my senses could perceive, no small part of a reality suggested, dreamed, unseizable, to give me, among those regions through which I was passing, more than an aesthetic feeling, a transient but exalted ambition to stay there and to live there always. How often since then, simply because I could smell green leaves, has not being seated on a back-seat opposite Mme. de Villeparisis, meeting the Princesse de Luxembourg who waved a greeting to her from her own carriage, coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel appeared to me as one of those indescribable happinesses which neither the present nor the future can restore to us, which we may taste once only in a lifetime.

Often dusk would have fallen before we reached the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

hotel. Timidly I would quote to Mme. de Villeparisis, pointing to the moon in the sky, some memorable expression of Chateaubriand or Vigny or Victor Hugo : "Shedding abroad that ancient secret of melancholy" or "Weeping like Diana by the brink of her streams" or "The shadows nuptial, solemn and august."

"And so you think that good, do you?" she would ask, "inspired, as you call it. I must confess that I am always surprised to see people taking things seriously nowadays which the friends of those gentlemen, while doing ample justice to their merits, were the first to laugh at. People weren't so free then with the word 'inspired' as they are now, when if you say to a writer that he has mere talent he thinks you're insulting him. You quote me a fine passage from M. de Chateaubriand about moonlight. You shall see that I have my own reasons for being refractory. M. de Chateaubriand used constantly to come to see my father. He was quite a pleasant person when you were alone with him, because then he was simple and amusing, but the moment he had an audience he would begin to pose, and then he became absurd; when my father was in the room, he pretended that he had flung his resignation in the King's face, and that he had controlled the voting in the Conclave, forgetting that it was my father whom he had asked to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had heard him make the most idiotic forecasts of the Papal election. You ought to have heard M. de Blacas on that famous Conclave; he was a very different kind of man from M. de Chateaubriand. As to his fine phrases about the moon, they became part of our regular programme for entertaining our guests. Whenever there

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

was any moonlight about the house, if there was anyone staying with us for the first time he would be told to take M. de Chateaubriand for a stroll after dinner. When they came in, my father would take his guest aside and say : 'Well, and was M. de Chateaubriand very eloquent ?'—'Oh, yes.' 'He's been talking about the moon ?'—'Yes, how did you know ?'—'One moment, didn't he say——' and then my father would quote the passage. 'He did ; but how in the world . . . ?'—'And he spoke to you of the moonlight on the Roman Campaigna ?'—'But, my dear sir, you're a magician.' My father was no magician, but M. de Chateaubriand had the same little speech about the moon which he served up every time."

At the mention of Vigny she laughed : "The man who said : 'I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny !' One either is a Comte or one isn't ; it is not of the slightest importance." And then perhaps she discovered that it was after all, of some slight importance, for she went on : "For one thing I am by no means sure that he was, and in any case he was of the humblest origin, that gentleman who speaks in his verses of his 'Esquire's crest'. In such charming taste, is it not, and so interesting to his readers ! Like Musset, a plain Paris cit, who laid so much stress on 'The golden falcon that surmounts my helm'. As if you would ever hear a real gentleman say a thing like that ! And yet Musset had some talent as a poet. But except *Cinq-Mars* I have never been able to read a thing by M. de Vigny. I get so bored that the book falls from my hands. M. Molé, who had all the cleverness and tact that were wanting in M. de Vigny, put him properly in his place when he welcomed him to the Academy. Do you

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

mean to say you don't know the speech? It is a masterpiece of irony and impertinence." She found fault with Balzac, whom she was surprised to see her nephews admire, for having pretended to describe a society "in which he was never received" and of which his descriptions were wildly improbable. As for Victor Hugo, she told us that M. de Bouillon, her father, who had friends among the young leaders of the Romantic movement, had been taken by some of them to the first performance of *Hernani*, but that he had been unable to sit through it, so ridiculous had he found the lines of that talented but extravagant writer who had acquired the title of "Major Poet" only by virtue of having struck a bargain, and as a reward for the not disinterested indulgence that he shewed to the dangerous errors of the Socialists.

We had now come in sight of the hotel, with its lights, so hostile that first evening, on our arrival, now protecting and kind, speaking to us of home. And when the carriage drew up outside the door, the porter, the pages, the lift-boy, attentive, clumsy, vaguely uneasy at our lateness, were numbered, now that they had grown familiar, among those beings who change so many times in the course of our life, as we ourselves change, but by whom, when they are for the time being the mirror of our habits, we find something attractive in the feeling that we are being faithfully reflected and in a friendly spirit. We prefer them to friends whom we have not seen for some time, for they contain more of what we actually are. Only the outside page, exposed to the sun all day, had been taken indoors for protection from the cold night air and swaddled in thick woollen garments which, combined with the orange effulgence of his locks and the curiously red bloom

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of his cheeks, made one, seeing him there through the glass front of the hall, think of a hot-house plant muffled up for protection from the frost. We got out of the carriage, with the help of a great many more servants than were required, but they were conscious of the importance of the scene and each felt obliged to take some part in it. I was always very hungry. And so, often, so as not to keep dinner waiting, I would not go upstairs first to the room which had succeeded in becoming so really mine that to catch sight of its long violet curtains and low bookcases was to find myself alone again with that self of which things, like people, gave me a reflected image ; but we would all wait together in the hall until the head waiter came to tell us that our dinner was ready. And this gave us another opportunity of listening to Mme. de Villeparisis.

"But you must be tired of us by now," protested my grandmother.

"Not at all ! Why, I am delighted, what could be nicer ?" replied her friend with a winning smile, drawing out, almost intoning her words in a way that contrasted markedly with her customary simplicity of speech.

And indeed at such moments as this she was not natural, her mind reverted to her early training, to the aristocratic manner in which a great lady is supposed to shew common people that she is glad to see them, that she is not at all stiff. And her one and only failure in true politeness lay in this excess of politeness ; which it was easy to identify as one of the professional "wrinkles" of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, who, always seeing in her humbler friends the latent discontent that she must one day arouse in their bosoms, greedily seizes every opportunity on which she can possibly, in the ledger in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

which she keeps her social account with them, write down a credit balance which will allow her to enter presently on the opposite page the dinner or reception to which she will not invite them. And so, having long ago taken effect in her once and for all, and ignoring the fact that now both the circumstances and the people concerned were different, that in Paris she hoped to see us often, come to her house, the spirit of her caste was urging Mme. de Villeparisis on with feverish ardour, and as if the time that was allowed her for being kind to us was limited, to multiply, while we were still at Balbec, her gifts of roses and melons, loans of books, drives in her carriage and verbal effusions. And for that reason, quite as much as the dazzling glories of the beach, the many-coloured flamboyance and sub-aqueous light of the rooms, as much even as the riding-lessons by which tradesmen's sons were deified like Alexander of Macedon, the daily kindnesses shewn us by Mme. de Villeparisis and also the unaccustomed, momentary, holiday ease with which my grandmother accepted them have remained in my memory as typical of life at a watering-place.

"Give them your cloaks to take upstairs."

My grandmother handed hers to the manager, and because he had been so nice to me I was distressed by this want of consideration, which seemed to pain him.

"I think you've hurt his feelings," said the Marquise. "He probably fancies himself too great a gentleman to carry your wraps. I remember so well the Duc de Nemours, when I was still quite little, coming to see my father who was living then on the top floor of the Bouillon house, with a fat parcel under his arm of letters and newspapers. I can see the Prince now, in his blue coat,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

framed in our doorway, which had such pretty woodwork round it—I think it was Bagard made it—you know those fine laths that they used to cut, so supple that the joiner would twist them sometimes into little shells and flowers, like the ribbons round a nosegay. ‘Here you are, Cyrus,’ he said to my father, ‘look what your porter’s given me to bring you. He said to me : Since you’re going up to see the Count, it’s not worth my while climbing all those stairs ; but take care you don’t break the string.’” Now that you have got rid of your things, why don’t you sit down ; look, sit in this seat,” she said to my grandmother, taking her by the hand.

“Oh, if you don’t mind, not in that one ! There is not room for two, and it’s too big for me by myself ; I shouldn’t feel comfortable.”

“You remind me, for it was exactly like this, of a seat that I had for many years until at last I couldn’t keep it any longer because it had been given to my mother by the poor Duchesse de Praslin. My mother, though she was the simplest person in the world, really, had ideas that belonged to another generation, which even in those days I could scarcely understand ; and at first she had not been at all willing to let herself be introduced to Mme. de Praslin, who had been plain Mlle. Sebastiani, while she, because she was a Duchess, felt that it was not for her to be introduced to my mother. And really, you know,” Mme. de Villeparisis went on, forgetting that she herself did not understand these fine shades of distinction, “even if she had just been Mme. de Choiseul, there was a good deal to be said for her claim. The Choiseuls are everything you could want ; they spring from a sister of Louis the Fat ; they were ruling princes down in Basigny. I admit that

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

we beat them in marriages and in distinction, but the precedence is pretty much the same. This little difficulty gave rise to several amusing incidents, such as a luncheon party which was kept waiting a whole hour or more before one of these ladies could make up her mind to let herself be introduced to the other. In spite of which they became great friends, and she gave my mother a seat like that, in which people always refused to sit, just as you did, until one day my mother heard a carriage drive into the courtyard. She asked a young servant we had, who it was. 'The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, ma'am.' 'Very well, say that I am at home.' A quarter of an hour passed ; no one came. 'What about the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld ?' my mother asked, 'where is she ?' 'She's on the stairs, ma'am, getting her breath,' said the young servant, who had not been long up from the country, where my mother had the excellent habit of getting all her servants. Often she had seen them born. That's the only way to get really good ones. And they're the rarest of luxuries. And sure enough the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld had the greatest difficulty in getting upstairs, for she was an enormous woman, so enormous, indeed, that when she did come into the room my mother was quite at a loss for a moment to know where to put her. And then the seat that Mme. de Praslin had given her caught her eye. 'Won't you sit down ?' she said, bringing it forward. And the Duchess filled it from side to side. She was quite a pleasant woman, for all her massiveness. 'She still creates an effect when she comes in,' one of our friends said once. 'She certainly creates an effect when she goes out,' said my mother, who was rather more free in her speech than would be thought

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

proper nowadays. Even in Mme. de La Rochefoucauld's own drawing-room people weren't afraid to make fun of her to her face (at which she was always the first to laugh) over her ample proportions. 'But are you all alone?' my grandmother once asked M. de La Rochefoucauld, when she had come to pay a call on the Duchess, and being met at the door by him had not seen his wife who was at the other end of the room. 'Is Mme. de La Rochefoucauld not at home? • I don't see her.'—'How charming of you!' replied the Duke, who had about the worst judgment of any man I have ever known, but was not altogether lacking in humour."

After dinner, when I had retired upstairs with my grandmother, I said to her that the qualities which attracted us in Mme. de Villeparisis, her tact, her shrewdness, her discretion, her modesty in not referring to herself, were not, perhaps, of very great value since those who possessed them in the highest degree were simply people like Molé and Loménie, and that if the want of them can make our social relations unpleasant yet it did not prevent from becoming Chateaubriand, Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, a lot of foolish fellows who had no judgment, at whom it was easy to mock, like Bloch. . . . But at the name of Bloch, my grandmother cried out in protest. And she began to praise Mme. de Villeparisis. As we are told that it is the preservation of the species which guides our individual preferences in love, and, so that the child may be constituted in the most normal fashion, sends fat men in pursuit of lean women and *vice versa*, so in some dim way it was the requirements of my happiness threatened by my disordered nerves, by my morbid tendency to melancholy, to solitude, that made her allot

REMEMBRANCE¹ OF THINGS PAST

the highest place to the qualities of balance and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme. de Villeparisis but to a society in which our ancestors saw blossom the minds of, a Doudan, a M. de Rémusat, not to mention a Beauséjour, a Joubert, a Sévigné, a type of mind that invests life with more happiness, with greater dignity than the converse refinements which brought a Baudelaire, a Poe, a Verlaine, a Rimbaud to sufferings, to a disrepute such as my grandmother did not wish for her daughter's child. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked her if she had noticed some expression which Mme. de Villeparisis had used and which seemed to point to a woman who thought more of her noble birth than she was prepared to admit. In this way I used to submit my impressions of life to my grandmother, for I was never certain what degree of respect was due to anyone until she had informed me. Every evening I would come to her with the mental sketches that I had made during the day of all those non-existent people who were not her. Once I said to her : "I shouldn't be able to live without you." "But you mustn't speak like that ;" her voice was troubled. "We must harden our hearts more than that, you know. Or what would become of you if I went away on a journey ? But I hope that you would be quite sensible and quite happy."

"I could manage to be sensible if you went away for a few days, but I should count the hours."

"But if I were to go away for months . . ." (at the bare suggestion of such a thing my heart was wrung.) ". . . for years . . . for . . ."

We both remained silent. We dared not look one another in the face. And yet I was suffering more keenly

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

from her anguish than from my own. And so I walked across to the window, and said to her, with a studied clearness of tone but with averted eyes :

“ You know what a creature of habit I am. For the first few days after I have been parted from the people I love best, I am wretched. But though I go on loving them just as much, I grow used to their absence ; life becomes calm, bearable, pleasant ; I could stand being parted from them for months, for years . . . ”

I was obliged to stop, and looked straight out of the window. My grandmother went out of the room for something. But next day I began to talk to her about philosophy, and, speaking in a tone of complete indifference, but at the same time taking care that my grandmother should pay attention to what I was saying, I remarked what a curious thing it was that, according to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling, and the most likely thing to be, once again, the survival of the soul and reunion in a life everlasting.

Mme. de Villeparisis gave us warning that presently she would not be able to see so much of us. A young nephew who was preparing for Saumur, and was meanwhile stationed in the neighbourhood, at Doncières, was coming to spend a few weeks' furlough with her, and she would be devoting most of her time to him. In the course of our drives together she had boasted to us of his extreme cleverness, and above all of his goodness of heart ; already I was imagining that he would have an instinctive feeling for me, that I was to be his best friend ; and when, before his arrival, his aunt gave my grandmother to understand that he had unfortunately fallen into the clutches

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

of an appalling woman with whom he was quite infatuated and who would never let him go, since I believed that that sort of love was doomed to end in mental aberration, crime and suicide, thinking how short the time was that was set apart for our friendship, already so great in my heart, although I had not yet set eyes on him, I wept for that friendship and for the misfortunes that were in store for it, as we weep for a person whom we love when some one has just told us that he is seriously ill and that his days are numbered.

One afternoon of scorching heat I was in the dining-room of the hotel, which they had plunged in semi-darkness, to shield it from the glare, by drawing the curtains which the sun gilded, while through the gaps between them I caught flashing blue glimpses of the sea, when along the central gangway leading inland from the beach to the high road I saw, tall, slender, his head held proudly erect upon a springing neck, a young man go past with searching eyes, whose skin was as fair and his hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the sun. Dressed in a clinging, almost white material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less vividly than the coolness of the dining-room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were of the colour of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for the smartness of his clothes. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the young Duc d'Uzès in a duel. One felt that this so special

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his figure, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. So that when, before the attachment which Mme. de Villeparisis had been deploring, the prettiest women in society had disputed the possession of him, his presence, at a watering-place for instance, in the company of the beauty of the season to whom he was paying court, not only made her conspicuous, but attracted every eye fully as much to himself. Because of his "tone", of his impertinence befitting a young "lion", and especially of his astonishing good looks, some people even thought him effeminate, though without attaching any stigma, for everyone knew how manly he was and that he was a passionate "womaniser". This was Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew of whom she had spoken to us. I was overcome with joy at the thought that I was going to know him and to see him for several weeks on end, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strode rapidly across the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall gave him a background against which he was drawn at full length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in any way falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary life, but by choosing for their sitter appropriate surroundings, a polo ground, golf links, a race-course, the bridge of a yacht, to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old masters used

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair was waiting for him at the door ; and, while his monocle resumed its gambollings in the air of the sunlit street, with the elegance and mastery which a great pianist contrives to display in the simplest piece of execution, where it has not appeared possible that he could shew himself superior to a performer of the second class, Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew, taking the reins that were handed him by the groom, jumped on to the box seat by his side and, while he opened a letter which the manager of the hotel sent out after him, made his horses start.

What a disappointment was mine on the days that followed, when, each time that I met him outside or in the hotel—his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their centre of gravity—I was forced to admit that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance, and saw that he did not bow to us although he must have known that we were friends of his aunt. And calling to mind the friendliness that Mme. de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois had shewn me, I thought that perhaps they were only of a bogus nobility, and that there might be a secret section in the laws that govern the aristocracy which allowed women, perhaps, and certain diplomats to discard, in their relations with plebeians, for a reason which was beyond me, the stiffness which must, on the other hand, be pitilessly maintained by a young Marquis. My intelligence might have told me the opposite. But the characteristic feature of the silly phase through which I was passing—a phase by no means irresponsible, indeed highly fertile—is that we do not consult

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

our intelligence and that the most trivial attributes of other people seem to us then to form an inseparable part of their personality. In a world thronged with monsters and with gods, we are barely conscious of tranquillity. There is hardly one of the actions which we performed in that phase which we would not give anything, in later life, to be able to erase from our memory. Whereas what we ought to regret is that we no longer possess the spontaneity which made us perform them. In later life we look at things in a more practical way, in full conformity with the rest of society, but youth was the only time in which we learned anything.

This insolence which I surmised in M. de Saint-Loup, and all that it implied of ingrained severity, received confirmation from his attitude whenever he passed us, his body as inflexibly erect, his head always held as high, his gaze as impassive, or rather, I should say, as implacable, devoid of that vague respect which one has for the rights of other people, even if they do not know one's aunt, one example of which was that I did not look in quite the same way at an old lady as at a gas lamp. These frigid manners were as far removed from the charming letters which, but a few days since, I had still been imagining him as writing to tell me of his regard for myself, as is removed from the enthusiasm of the Chamber and of the populace which he has been picturing himself as rousing by an imperishable speech, the humble, dull, obscure position of the dreamer who, after pondering it thus by himself, for himself, aloud, finds himself, once the imaginary applause has died away, just the same Tom, Dick or Harry as before. When Mme. de Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and evil nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible goodness of her great-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marvelled how the world, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribes tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own sets. Mme. de Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her nephew's character one day when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that there was nothing for it but to introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being repeated to him, not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shone not the faintest gleam of human sympathy, shewed merely in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an exaggeration failing which there would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors. Then fastening on me those hard eyes, as though he wished to make sure of me before returning my salute, by an abrupt release which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than to an exercise of will, keeping between himself and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed that it must mean, at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. But he spoke to me only of literature, declared after a long talk that he would like immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof of an ardent zest for the things of the spirit, he

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

had shewn a regard for myself which was little in keeping with his greeting of me the day before. After I had seen him repeat the same process whenever anyone was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs ; he went through those motions without thinking, any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair ; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed to them, a thing purely acquired like that other habit that he had of at once demanding an introduction to the family of anyone whom he knew, which had become so instinctive in him that, seeing me again the day after our talk, he fell upon me and without asking how I did begged me to make him known to my grandmother, who was with me, with the same feverish haste as if the request had been due to some instinct of self-preservation, like the act of warding off a blow, or of shutting one's eyes to avoid a stream of boiling water, without which precautions it would have been dangerous to stay where one was a moment longer.

The first rites of exorcism once performed, as a wicked fairy discards her outer form and endues all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man that I had ever met. "Good," I said to myself, "I've been mistaken about him once already ; I was taken in by a mirage ; but I have corrected the first only to fall into a second, for he must be a great gentleman who has grown sick of his nobility and is trying to hide it." As a matter of fact it was not long before all the exquisite breed-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ing, all the friendliness of Saint-Loup were indeed to let me see another creature but one very different from what I had suspected.

This young man who had the air of a scornful, sporting aristocrat had in fact no respect, no interest save for and in the things of the spirit, and especially those modern manifestations of literature and art which seemed so ridiculous to his aunt ; he was imbued, moreover, with what she called "Socialistic spoutings," was filled with the most profound contempt for his caste and spent long hours in the study of Nietzsche and Proudhon. He was one of those intellectuals, quick to admire what is good, who shut themselves up in a book, and are interested only in pure thought. Indeed in Saint-Loup the expression of this highly abstract tendency, which removed him so far from my customary preoccupations, while it seemed to me touching, also annoyed me not a little. I may say that when I realised properly who had been his father, on days when I had been reading memoirs rich in anecdotes of that famous Comte de Marsantes, in whom were embodied the special graces of a generation already remote, the mind full of speculation—anxious to obtain fuller details of the life that M. de Marsantes had led, it used to infuriate me that Robert de Saint-Loup, instead of being content to be the son of his father, instead of being able to guide me through the old-fashioned romance of what had been that father's existence, had trained himself to enjoy Nietzsche and Proudhon. His father would not have shared my regret. He had been himself a man of brains, who had transcended the narrow confines of his life as a man of the world. He had hardly had time to know his son, but had hoped that his son would prove

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

a better man than himself. And I really believe that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired his son, would have rejoiced at his abandoning what had been his own small diversions for austere meditations, and without saying a word, in his modesty as a great gentleman endowed with brains, he would have read in secret his son's favourite authors in order to appreciate how far Robert was superior to himself.

There was, however, this rather painful consideration : that if M. de Marsantes, with his extremely open mind, would have appreciated a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup, because he was one of those who believe that merit is attached only to certain forms of art and of life, had an affectionate but slightly contemptuous memory of a father who had spent all his time hunting and racing, who yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach. Saint-Loup had not the intelligence to see that intellectual worth has nothing to do with adhesion to any one aesthetic formula, and had for the intellectuality of M. de Marsantes much the same sort of scorn as might have been felt for Boieldieu or Labiche by a son of Boieldieu or Labiche who had become adepts in the most symbolic literature and the most complex music. "I scarcely knew my father," he used to say. "He seems to have been a charming person. His tragedy was the deplorable age in which he lived. To have been born in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to have to live in the days of La Belle Hélène would be enough to wreck any existence. Perhaps if he'd been some little shopkeeper mad about the Ring he'd have turned out quite different. Indeed they tell me that he was fond of literature. But that can never be proved, because literature to him meant such

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

utterly god-forsaken book⁵.” And in my own case, if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by the weight of the intelligence that it contained, never perceiving the magic appeal to the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I—I, to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior—could take any interest in them.

From the first Saint-Loup made a conquest of my grandmother, not only by the incessant acts of kindness which he went out of his way to shew to us both, but by the naturalness which he put into them as into everything. For naturalness—doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate—was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as there had been in our Combray garden, too formal borders, or at table, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you could hardly detect the foodstuffs that had gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too laboured, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein. This naturalness she found and enjoyed even in the clothes that Saint-Loup wore, of a pliant elegance, with nothing swagger, nothing formal about them, no stiffness or starch. She appreciated this rich young man still more highly for the free and careless way that he had of living in luxury without “smelling of money”, without giving himself airs ; she even discovered the charm of this naturalness in the incapacity which Saint-Loup had kept, though as a rule it is outgrown with

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

childhood, at the same time as certain physiological peculiarities of that period, for preventing his face from at once reflecting every emotion. Something, for instance, that he wanted to have but had not expected, were it no more than a compliment, reacted in him in a burst of pleasure so quick, so burning, so volatile, so expansive that it was impossible for him to contain and to conceal it ; a grin of delight seized irresistible hold of his face ; the too delicate skin of his cheeks allowed a vivid glow to shine through them, his eyes sparkled with confusion and joy ; and my grandmother was infinitely touched by this charming show of innocence and frankness, which, incidentally, in Saint-Loup—at any rate at the period of our first friendship—was not misleading. But I have known another person, and there are many such, in whom the physiological sincerity of that fleeting blush in no way excluded moral duplicity ; as often as not it proves nothing more than the vivacity with which pleasure is felt—so that it disarms them and they are forced publicly to confess it—by natures capable of the vilest treachery. But where my grandmother did really adore Saint-Loup's naturalness was in his way of admitting, without any evasion, his affection for me, to give expression to which he found words than which she herself, she told me, could not have thought of any more appropriate, more truly loving, words to which “Sévigné and Beauséjour” might have set their signatures. He was not afraid to make fun of my weaknesses—which he had discerned with an acuteness that made her smile—but as she herself would have done, lovingly, at the same time extolling my good qualities with a warmth, an impulsive freedom that shewed no sign of the reserve, the coldness by means of

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

which young men of his age are apt to suppose that they give themselves importance. And he shewed in forestalling every discomfort, however slight, in covering my legs if the day had turned cold without my noticing it, in arranging (without telling me) to stay later with me in the evening if he thought that I was depressed or felt unwell, a vigilance which, from the point of view of my health, for which a more hardening discipline would perhaps have been better, my grandmother found almost excessive, though as a proof of his affection for myself she was deeply touched by it.

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends for ever, and he would say "our friendship" as though he were speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called—not counting his love for his mistress—the great joy of his life. These words made me rather uncomfortable and I was at a loss for an answer, for I did not feel when I was with him and talked to him—and no doubt it would have been the same with everyone else—any of that happiness which it was, on the other hand, possible for me to experience when I was by myself. For alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of comfort. But as soon as I was with some one else, when I began to talk to a friend, my mind at once "turned about", it was towards the listener and not myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. Once I had left Saint-Loup, I managed, with the help of words, to put more or less in order the confused minutes that I had spent

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

with him ; I told myself that I had a good friend, that a good friend was a rare thing, and I tasted, when I felt myself surrounded by "goods" that were difficult to acquire, what was precisely the opposite of the pleasure that was natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure of having extracted from myself and brought to light something that was hidden in my inner darkness. If I had spent two or three hours in conversation with Saint-Loup, and he had expressed his admiration of what I had said to him, I felt a sort of remorse, or regret, or weariness at not having been left alone and ready, at last, to begin my work. But I told myself that one is not given intelligence for one's own benefit only, that the greatest of men have longed for appreciation, that I could not regard as wasted hours in which I had built up an exalted idea of myself in the mind of my friend ; I had no difficulty in persuading myself that I ought to be happy in consequence, and I hoped all the more anxiously that this happiness might never be taken from me simply because I had not yet been conscious of it. We fear more than the loss of everything else the disappearance of the "goods" that have remained beyond our reach, because our heart has not taken possession of them. I felt that I was capable of exemplifying the virtues of friendship better than most people (because I should always place the good of my friends before those personal interests to which other people were devoted but which did not count for me), but not of finding happiness in a feeling which, instead of multiplying the differences that there were between my nature and those of other people—as there are among all of us—would cancel them. At the same time my mind was distinguishing in Saint-Loup a personality more col-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

lective than his own, that of the "noble"; which like an indwelling spirit moved his limbs, ordered his gestures and his actions; then, at such moments, although in his company, I was as much alone as I should have been gazing at a landscape the harmony of which I could understand. He was no more than an object the properties of which, in my musing contemplations, I sought to explore. The perpetual discovery in him of this pre-existent, this aeonial creature, this aristocrat who was just what Robert aspired not to be, gave me a keen delight, but one that was intellectual and not social. In the moral and physical agility which gave so much grace to his kindnesses, in the ease with which he offered my grandmother his carriage and made her get into it, in the alacrity with which he sprang from the box, when he was afraid that I might be cold, to spread his own cloak over my shoulders, I felt not only the inherited liveness of the mighty hunters who had been for generations the ancestors of this young man who made no pretence save to intellectuality, their scorn of wealth which, subsisting in him side by side with his enjoyment of it simply because it enabled him to entertain his friends more lavishly, made him so carelessly shower his riches at their feet; I felt in him especially the certainty or the illusion in the minds of those great lords of being "better than other people", thanks to which they had not been able to hand down to Saint-Loup that anxiety to shew that one is "just as good", that dread of seeming inferior, of which he was indeed wholly unconscious, but which mars with so much ugliness, so much awkwardness, the most sincere overtures of a plebeian. Sometimes I found fault with myself for thus taking pleasure in my friend as in a work of art, that is to say in re-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

garding the play of all the parts of his being as harmoniously ordered by a general idea from which they depended but which he did not know, so that it added nothing to his own good qualities, to that personal value, intellectual and moral, to which he attached so high a price.

And yet that idea was to a certain extent their determining cause. It was because he was a gentleman that that mental activity, those socialist aspirations, which made him seek the company of young students, arrogant and ill-dressed, connoted in him something really pure and disinterested which was not to be found in them. Looking upon himself as the heir of an ignorant and selfish caste, he was sincerely anxious that they should forgive in him that aristocratic origin which they, on the contrary, found irresistibly attractive and on account of which they sought to know him, though with a show of coldness and indeed of insolence towards him. He was thus led to make advances to people from whom my parents, faithful to the sociological theories of Combray, would have been stupefied at his not turning away in disgust. One day when we were sitting on the sands, Saint-Loup and I, we heard issuing from a canvas tent against which we were leaning a torrent of imprecation against the swarm of Israelites that infested Balbec. "You can't go a yard without meeting them," said the voice. "I am not in principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish nation, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, 'I thay, Apraham, I've chust theen Chacop.' You would think you were in the Rue d'Aboukir." The man who thus inveighed against Israel emerged at last from the tent; we raised our eyes to behold this antisemite. It was my old friend Bloch. Saint-Loup at once begged me

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

to remind him that they had met before the Board of Examiners, when Bloch had carried off the prize of honour, and since then at a popular university course.

At the most I may have smiled now and then, to discover in Robert the marks of his Jesuit schooling, in the awkwardness which the fear of hurting people's feelings at once created in him whenever one of his intellectual friends made a social error, did something silly to which Saint-Loup himself attached no importance but felt that the other would have blushed if anybody had noticed it. And it was Robert who used to blush as though it had been he that was to blame, for instance on the day when Bloch, after promising to come and see him at the hotel, went on :

"As I cannot endure to be kept waiting among all the false splendour of these great caravanserais, and the Hungarian band would make me ill, you must tell the 'light-boy' to make them shut up, and to let you know at once."

Personally, I was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel. He was at Balbec not by himself, unfortunately, but with his sisters, and they in turn had innumerable relatives and friends staying there. Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasant. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Rumania, where the geography books teach us that the Israelite population does not enjoy anything approaching the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no blend of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their coreligionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

gentlemen branching off towards the baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go past and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a sign with them, whether these were on the Cambremers' list, or the presiding magistrate's little group, professional or "business" people, or even simple corn-chandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, derisive and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred tom-boys, who carried their zeal for "seaside fashions" so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of what people call the "intelligent research" of painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to Saint Peter or to Ali-Baba the identical features of the heaviest "punter" at the Balbec tables. Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother, their blindly worshipped idol. So that it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, merits and virtues. But in order to experience these, one had first to penetrate its enclosure. Now it was not popular; it could feel this; it saw in its unpopularity the mark of an antisemitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one ever dreamed of trying to make his way.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

At his use of the word "light" I had all the less reason to be surprised in that, a few days before, Bloch having asked me why I had come to Balbec (although it seemed to him perfectly natural that he himself should be there) and whether it had been "in the hope of making grand friends", when I had explained to him that this visit was a fulfilment of one of my earliest longings, though one not so deep as my longing to see Venice, he had replied: "Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while you pretend to be reading the *Stones of Venighce*, by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary shaver, in fact one of the most garrulous old barbers that you could find." So that Bloch evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called "Lord", but the letter 'i' was invariably pronounced 'igh'. As for Saint-Loup, this mistake in pronunciation seemed to him all the less serious inasmuch as he saw in it pre-eminently a want of those almost "society" notions which my new friend despised as fully as he was versed in them. But the fear lest Bloch, discovering one day that one says "Venice" and that Ruskin was not a lord, should retrospectively imagine that Robert had been laughing at him, made the latter feel as guilty as if he had been found wanting in the indulgence with which, as we have seen, he overflowed, so that the blush which would no doubt one day dye the cheek of Bloch on the discovery of his error, Robert already, by anticipation and reflex action, could feel mounting to his own. For he fully believed that Bloch attached more importance than he to this mistake. Which Bloch proved to be true some time later, when he heard me pronounce the word "lift", by breaking in with:

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

“Oh, you say ‘lift’, do you?” And then, in a dry and lofty tone: “Not that it is of the slightest importance.” A phrase that is like a reflex action of the body, the same in all men whose self-esteem is great, in the gravest circumstances as well as in the most trivial, betraying there as clearly as on this occasion how important the thing in question seems to him who declares that it is of no importance; a tragic phrase at times, the first to escape (and then how heart-breaking) the lips of every man at all proud from whom we have just taken the last hope to which he still clung by refusing to do him a service. “Oh, well, it’s not of the slightest importance; I shall make some other arrangement:” the other arrangement which it is not of the slightest importance that he should be driven to adopt being often suicide.

Apart from this, Bloch made me the prettiest speeches. He was certainly anxious to be on the best of terms with me. And yet he asked me: “Is it because you’ve taken a fancy to raise yourself to the peerage that you run after de Saint-Loup-en-Bray? You must be going through a fine crisis of snobbery. Tell me, are you a snob? I think so, what?” Not that his desire to be friendly had suddenly changed. But what is called, in not too correct language, “ill breeding” was his defect, and therefore the defect which he was bound to overlook, all the more that by which he did not believe that other people could be shocked. In the human race the frequency of the virtues that are identical in us all is not more wonderful than the multiplicity of the defects that are peculiar to each one of us. Undoubtedly, it is not common sense that is “the commonest thing in the world”; but human kindness. In the most distant, the most deso-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

late ends of the earth, we marvel to see it blossom of its own accord, as in a remote valley a poppy like the poppies in the world beyond, poppies which it has never seen as it has never known aught but the wind that, now and again, stirring the folds of its scarlet cloak, disturbs its solitude. Even if this human kindness, paralysed by self-interest, is not exercised, it exists none the less, and whenever any inconstant egoist does not restrain its action, when, for example, he is reading a novel or a newspaper, it will bud, blossom, grow, even in the heart of him who, cold-blooded in real life, has retained a tender heart, as a lover of fiction, for the weak, the righteous and the persecuted. But the variety of our defects is no less remarkable than the similarity of our virtues. Each of us has his own, so much so that to continue loving him we are obliged not to take them into account but to ignore them and look only to the rest of his character. The most perfect person in the world has a certain defect which shocks us or makes us angry. One man is of rare intelligence, sees everything from an exalted angle, never speaks evil of anyone, but will pocket and forget letters of supreme importance which it was he himself who asked you to let him post for you, and will then miss a vital engagement without offering you any excuse, with a smile, because he prides himself upon never knowing the time. Another is so refined, so gentle, so delicate in his conduct that he never says anything about you before your face except what you are glad to hear; but you feel that he refrains from uttering, that he keeps buried in his heart, where they grow bitter, very different opinions, and the pleasure that he derives from seeing you is so dear to him that he will let you faint with ex-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

haustion sooner than leave you to yourself. A third has more sincerity, but carries it so far that he feels bound to let you know, when you have pleaded the state of your health as an excuse for not having been to see him, that you were seen going to the theatre and were reported to be looking well, or else that he has not been able to profit entirely by the action which you have taken on his behalf, which, by the way, three other of his friends had already offered to take, so that he is only moderately indebted to you. In similar circumstances the previous friend would have pretended not to know that you had gone to the theatre, or that other people could have done him the same service. But this last friend feels himself obliged to repeat or to reveal to somebody the very thing that is most likely to give offence ; is delighted with his own frankness and tells you, emphatically : " I am like that." While others infuriate you by their exaggerated curiosity, or by a want of curiosity so absolute that you can speak to them of the most sensational happenings without their grasping what it is all about ; and others again take months to answer you if your letter has been about something that concerns yourself and not them, or else, if they write that they are coming to ask you for something and you dare not leave the house for fear of missing them, do not appear, but leave you in suspense for weeks because, not having received from you the answer which their letter did not in the least " expect ", they have concluded that you must be cross with them. And others, considering their own wishes and not yours, talk to you without letting you get a word in if they are in good spirits and want to see you, however urgent the work you may have in hand, but if they feel exhausted

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

by the weather or out of humour, you cannot get a word out of them, they meet your efforts with an inert languor and no more take the trouble to reply, even in monosyllables, to what you say to them than if they had not heard you. Each of our friends has his defects so markedly that to continue to love him we are obliged to seek consolation for those defects—in the thought of his talent, his goodness, his affection for ourself—or rather to leave them out of account, and for that we need to display all our good will. Unfortunately our obliging obstinacy in refusing to see the defect in our friend is surpassed by the obstinacy with which he persists in that defect, from his own blindness to it or the blindness that he attributes to other people. For he does not notice it himself, or imagines that it is not noticed. Since the risk of giving offence arises principally from the difficulty of appreciating what does and what does not pass unperceived, we ought, at least, from prudence, never to speak of ourself, because that is a subject on which we may be sure that other people's views are never in accordance with our own. If we find as many surprises as on visiting a house of plain exterior which inside is full of hidden treasures, torture-chambers, skeletons, when we discover the true lives of other people, the real beneath the apparent universe, we are no less surprised if, in place of the image that we have made of ourself with the help of all the things that people have said to us, we learn from the terms in which they speak of us in our absence what an entirely different image they have been carrying in their own minds of us and of our life. So that whenever we have spoken about ourself, we may be sure that our inoffensive and prudent words, listened to with apparent

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

politeness and hypocritical approbation, have given rise afterwards to the most exasperated or the most mirthful, but in either case the least favourable criticism. The least risk that we run is that of irritating people by the disproportion that there is between our idea of ourself and the words that we use, a disproportion which as a rule makes people's talk about themselves as ludicrous as the performances of those self-styled music-lovers who when they feel the need to hum a favourite melody compensate for the inadequacy of their inarticulate murmurings by a strenuous mimicry and a look of admiration which is hardly justified by all that they let us hear. And to the bad habit of speaking about oneself and one's defects there must be added, as part of the same thing, that habit of denouncing in other people defects precisely analogous to one's own. For it is always of those defects that people speak, as though it were a way of speaking about oneself, indirectly, which added to the pleasure of absolution that of confession. Besides it seems that our attention, always attracted by what is characteristic of ourself, notices that more than anything else in other people. One short-sighted man says of another : "But he can scarcely open his eyes !" ; a consumptive has his doubts as to the pulmonary integrity of the most robust ; an unwashed man speaks only of the baths that other people do not take ; an evil-smelling man insists that other people smell ; a cuckold sees cuckolds everywhere, a light woman light women, a snob snobs. Then, too, every vice, like every profession, requires and trains a special knowledge which we are never loath to display. The invert detects and denounces inverts ; the tailor asked out to dine, before he has begun to talk to you, has passed judgment on the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

cloth of your coat, which his fingers are itching to feel, and if after a few words of conversation you were to ask a dentist what he really thought of you, he would tell you how many of your teeth wanted filling. To him nothing appears more important, nor more absurd to you who have noticed his own. And it is not only when we speak of ourselves that we imagine other people to be blind ; we behave as though they were. On every one of us there is a special god in attendance who hides from him or promises him the concealment from other people of his defect, just as he stops the eyes and nostrils of people who do not wash to the streaks of dirt which they carry in their ears and the smell of sweat which emanates from their armpits, and assures them that they can with impunity carry both of these about a world that will notice nothing. And those who wear artificial pearls, or give them as presents, imagine that people will take them to be genuine. Bloch was ill-bred, neurotic, a snob, and, since he belonged to a family of little repute, had to support, as on the floor of ocean, the incalculable pressure that was imposed on him not only by the Christians upon the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was immediately beneath it. To carve his way through to the open air by raising himself from Jewish family to Jewish family would have taken Bloch many thousands of years. It was better worth his while to seek an outlet in another direction.

When Bloch spoke to me of the crisis of snobbery through which I must be passing, and bade me confess that I was a snob, I might well have replied : " If I were, I should not be going about with you." I said

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

merely that he was not being very polite. Then he tried to apologise, but in the way that is typical of the ill-bred man who is only too glad to hark back to whatever it was if he can find an opportunity to aggravate his offence. "Forgive me," he used now to plead, whenever we met, "I have vexed you, tormented you ; I have been wantonly mischievous. And yet—man in general and your friend in particular is so singular an animal—you cannot imagine the affection that I, I who tease you so cruelly, have for you. It carries me often, when I think of you, to tears." And he gave an audible sob.

What astonished me more in Bloch than his bad manners was to find how the quality of his conversation varied. This youth, so hard to please that of authors who were at the height of their fame he would say : "He's a gloomy idiot ; he's a sheer imbecile," would every now and then tell, with immense gusto, stories that were simply not funny or would instance as a "really remarkable person" some man who was completely insignificant. This double scale of measuring the wit, the worth, the interest of people continued to puzzle me until I was introduced to M. Bloch, senior.

I had not supposed that we should ever be allowed to know him, for Bloch junior had spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had said to Robert that I was (always) a frightful snob. "Yes, really, he is overjoyed at knowing M. LLLLe-grandin." This trick of isolating a word, was, in Bloch, a sign at once of irony and of learning. Saint-Loup, who had never heard the name of Legrandin, was bewildered. "But who is he ?" "Oh, he's a bit of all right, he is !" Bloch laughed, thrusting his hands into his pockets as

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

though for warmth, convinced that he was at that moment engaged in contemplation of the picturesque aspect of an extraordinary country gentleman compared to whom those of Barbey d'Aureville were as nothing. He consoled himself for his inability to portray M. Legrandin by giving him a string of capital 'L's, smacking his lips over the name as over a wine from the farthest bin. But these subjective enjoyments remained hidden from other people. If he spoke ill of me to Saint-Loup he made up for it by speaking no less ill of Saint-Loup to me. We had each of us learned these slanders in detail, the next day, not that we repeated them to each other, a thing which would have seemed to us very wrong, but to Bloch appeared so natural and almost inevitable that in his natural anxiety, in the certainty moreover that he would be telling us only what each of us was bound sooner or later to know, he preferred to anticipate the disclosure and, taking Saint-Loup aside, admitted that he had spoken ill of him, on purpose, so that it might be repeated to him, swore to him "by Zeus Kronion, binder of oaths" that he loved him dearly, that he would lay down his life for him ; and wiped away a tear. The same day, he contrived to see me alone, made his confession, declared that he had acted in my interest, because he felt that a certain kind of social intercourse was fatal to me and that I was "worthy of better things." Then, clasping me by the hand, with the sentimentality of a drunkard, albeit his drunkenness was purely nervous : "Believe me," he said, "and may the black Ker seize me this instant and bear me across the portals of Hades, hateful to men, if yesterday, when I thought of you, of Combray, of my boundless affection for you, of afternoon hours in class

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

which you do not even remember, I did not lie awake weeping all night long. Yes, all night long, I swear it, and alas, I know—for I know the human soul—you will not believe me." I did indeed "not believe" him, and to his words which, I felt, he was making up on the spur of the moment, and expanding as he went on, his swearing "by Ker" added no great weight, the Hellenic cult being in Bloch purely literary. Besides, whenever he began to grow sentimental and wished his hearer to grow sentimental over a falsehood, he would say: "I swear it", more for the hysterical satisfaction of lying than to make people think that he was speaking the truth. I did not believe what he was saying, but I bore him no ill-will for that, for I had inherited from my mother and grandmother their incapacity for resentment even of far worse offenders, and their habit of never condemning anyone.

Besides, he was not altogether a bad youth, this Bloch; he could be, and was at times quite charming. And now that the race of Combray, the race from which sprang creatures absolutely unspoiled like my grandmother and mother, seems almost extinct, as I have hardly any choice now save between honest brutes, insensible and loyal, in whom the mere sound of their voices shews at once that they take absolutely no interest in one's life—and another kind of men who so long as they are with one understand one, cherish one, grow sentimental even to tears, take their revenge a few hours later by making some cruel joke at one's expense, but return to one, always just as comprehending, as charming, as closely assimilated, for the moment, to oneself, I think that it is of this latter sort that I prefer if not the moral worth at any rate the society.

"You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you,"

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Bloch went on. "When you come to think of it, it is a rather Jewish side of my nature," he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though he had to prepare for the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of "Jewish blood", and as might (but never would) have said a great French noble who among his ancestors, all Christian, might nevertheless have included Samuel Bernard, or further still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Lévy family claim descent, "coming out. I rather like," he continued "to find room among my feelings for the share (not that it is more than a very tiny share) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin." He made this statement because it seemed to him at once clever and courageous to speak the truth about his race, a truth which at the same time he managed to water down to a remarkable extent, like misers who decide to pay their debts but have not the courage to pay more than half. This kind of deceit which consists in having the boldness to proclaim the truth, but only after mixing with it an ample measure of lies which falsify it, is commoner than people think, and even among those who do not habitually practise it certain crises in life, especially those in which love is at stake, give them an opportunity of taking to it.

All these confidential diatribes by Bloch to Saint-Loup against me and to me against Saint-Loup ended in an invitation to dinner. I am by no means sure that he did not first make an attempt to secure Saint-Loup by himself. It would have been so like Bloch to do so that probably he did ; but if so success did not crown his effort, for it was to myself and Saint-Loup that Bloch said one day : "Dear master, and you, O horseman beloved of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, tamer of horses, since I have

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

encountered you by the shore of Amphitrite, resounding with foam, hard by the tents of the swift-shipped Méniers, will both of you come to dinner any day this week with my illustrious sire, of blameless heart?" He proffered this invitation because he desired to attach himself more closely to Saint-Loup who would, he hoped, secure him the right of entry into aristocratic circles. Formed by me for myself, this ambition would have seemed to Bloch the mark of the most hideous snobbishness, quite in keeping with the opinion that he already held of a whole side of my nature which he did not regard—or at least had not hitherto regarded—as its most important side; but the same ambition in himself seemed to him the proof of a finely developed curiosity in a mind anxious to carry out certain social explorations from which he might perhaps glean some literary benefit. M. Bloch senior, when his son had told him that he was going to bring one of his friends in to dinner, and had in a sarcastic but satisfied tone enunciated the name and title of that friend: "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray", had been thrown into great commotion. "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray! I'll be jiggered!" he had exclaimed, using the oath which was with him the strongest indication of social deference. And he cast at a son capable of having formed such an acquaintance an admiring glance which seemed to say: "Really, it is astounding. Can this prodigy be indeed a child of mine?" which gave my friend as much pleasure as if his monthly allowance had been increased by fifty francs. For Bloch was not in his element at home and felt that his father treated him like a lost sheep because of his lifelong admiration for Leconte de Lisle, Heredia and other "Bohemians". But to have got to

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

know Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been chairman of the Suez Canal board ("I'll be jiggered!") was an indisputable "score". What a pity, indeed, that they had left in Paris, for fear of its being broken on the journey, the stereoscope. Alone among men, M. Bloch senior had the art, or at least the right to exhibit it. He did this, moreover, on rare occasions only, and then to good purpose, on evenings when there was a full-dress affair, with hired waiters. So that from these exhibitions of the stereoscope there emanated, for those who were present, as it were a special distinction, a privileged position, and for the master of the house who gave them a reputation such as talent confers on a man—which could not have been greater had the photographs been taken by M. Bloch himself and the machine his own invention. "You weren't invited to Solomon's yesterday?" one of the family would ask another. "No! I was not one of the elect. What was on?" "Oh, a great how-d'ye-do, the stereoscope, the whole box of tricks!" "Indeed! If they had the stereoscope I'm sorry I wasn't there; they say Solomon is quite amazing when he works it."—"It can't be helped;" said M. Bloch now to his son, "it's a mistake to let him have everything at once; that would leave him nothing to look forward to." He had actually thought, in his paternal affection and in the hope of touching his son's heart, of sending for the instrument. But there was not time, or rather they had thought there would not be; for we were obliged to put off the dinner because Saint-Loup could not leave the hotel, where he was waiting for an uncle who was coming to spend a few days with Mme. de Villeparisis. Since—for he was greatly addicted to physical culture, and especially to long walks—

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

it was largely on foot, spending the night in wayside farms, that this uncle was to make the journey from the country house in which he was staying, the precise date of his arrival at Balbec was by no means certain. And Saint-Loup, afraid to stir out of doors, even entrusted me with the duty of taking to Incauville, where the nearest telegraph-office was, the messages that he sent every day to his mistress. The uncle for whom we were waiting was called Palamède, a name that had come down to him from his ancestors the Princes of Sicily. And later on when I found, as I read history, belonging to this or that Podestà or Prince of the Church, the same Christian name, a fine renaissance medal—some said, a genuine antique—that had always remained in the family, having passed from generation to generation, from the Vatican cabinet to the uncle of my friend, I felt the pleasure that is reserved for those who, unable from lack of means to start a case of medals, or a picture gallery, look out for old names (names of localities, instructive and picturesque as an old map, a bird's-eye view, a sign-board or a return of customs ; baptismal names, in which rings out and is plainly heard, in their fine French endings, the defect of speech, the intonation of a racial vulgarity, the vicious pronunciation by which our ancestors made Latin and Saxon words undergo lasting mutilations which in due course became the august law-givers of our grammar books) and, in short, by drawing upon their collections of ancient and sonorous words, give themselves concerts like the people who acquire viols da gamba and viols d'amour so as to perform the music of days gone by upon old-fashioned instruments. Saint-Loup told me that even in the most exclusive aristocratic society his uncle Palamède had the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

further distinction of being particularly difficult to approach, contemptuous, double-dyed in his nobility, forming with his brother's wife and a few other chosen spirits what was known as the Phoenix Club. There even his insolence was so much dreaded that it had happened more than once that people of good position who had been anxious to meet him and had applied to his own brother for an introduction had met with a refusal: "Really, you mustn't ask me to introduce you to my brother Palamède. My wife and I, we would all of us do our best for you, but it would be no good. Besides, there's always the danger of his being rude to you, and I shouldn't like that." At the Jockey Club he had, with a few of his friends, marked a list of two hundred members whom they would never allow to be introduced to them. And in the Comte de Paris's circle he was known by the nickname of "The Prince" because of his distinction and his pride.

Saint-Loup told me about his uncle's early life, now a long time ago. Every day he used to take women to a bachelor establishment which he shared with two of his friends, as good-looking as himself, on account of which they were known as "The Three Graces".

"One day, a man who just now is very much in the eye, as Balzac would say, of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but who at a rather awkward period of his early life displayed odd tastes, asked my uncle to let him come to this place. But no sooner had he arrived than it was not to the ladies but to my uncle Palamède that he began to make overtures. My uncle pretended not to understand, made an excuse to send for his two friends; they appeared on the scene, seized the offender, stripped him, thrashed him till he bled, and then with twenty degrees of frost

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

outside kicked him into the street where he was found more dead than alive ; so much so that the police started an inquiry which the poor devil had the greatest difficulty in getting them to abandon. My uncle would never go in for such drastic methods now, in fact you can't conceive the number of men of humble position that he, who is so haughty with people in society, has shewn his affection, taken under his wing, even if he is paid for it with ingratitude. It may be a servant who has looked after him in a hotel, for whom he will find a place in Paris, or a farm-labourer whom he will pay to have taught a trade. That is really the rather nice side of his character, in contrast to his social side." Saint-Loup indeed belonged to that type of young men of fashion, situated at an altitude at which it has been possible to cultivate such expressions as : "What is really rather nice about him", "His rather nice side", precious seeds which produce very rapidly a way of looking at things in which one counts oneself as nothing and the "people" as everything ; the exact opposite, in a word, of plebeian pride. "It seems, it is quite impossible to imagine how he set the tone, how he laid down the law for the whole of society when he was a young man. He acted entirely for himself ; in any circumstances he did what seemed pleasing to himself, what was most convenient, but at once the snobs would start copying him. If he felt thirsty at the play, and sent out from his box for a drink, the little sitting-rooms behind all the boxes would be filled, a week later, with refreshments. One wet summer, when he had a touch of rheumatism, he ordered an ulster of a loose but warm vicuna wool, which is used only for travelling rugs, and kept the blue and orange stripes shewing. The big tailors at once

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

received orders from all their customers for blue and orange ulsters of rough wool. If he had some reason for wishing to keep every trace of ceremony out of a dinner in a country house where he was spending the day, and to point the distinction had come without evening clothes and sat down to table in the suit he had been wearing that afternoon, it became the fashion, when you were dining in the country, not to dress. If he was eating some special sweet and instead of taking his spoon used a knife, or a special implement of his own invention which he had had made for him by a silversmith, or his fingers, it at once became wrong to eat it in any other way. He wanted once to hear some Beethoven quartets again (for with all his preposterous ideas he is no fool, mind, he has great gifts) and arranged for some musicians to come and play them to him and a few friends once a week. The ultra-fashionable thing that season was to give quite small parties, with chamber music. I should say he's not done at all badly out of life. With his looks, he must have had any number of women ! I can't tell you exactly whom, for he is very discreet. But I do know that he was thoroughly unfaithful to my poor aunt. Not that that prevented his being always perfectly charming to her, and her adoring him ; he was in mourning for her for years. When he is in Paris, he still goes to the cemetery nearly every day."

The morning after Robert had told me all these things about his uncle, while he waited for him (and waited, as it happened, in vain), as I was coming by myself past the Casino on my way back to the hotel, I had the sensation of being watched by somebody who was not far off. I turned my head and saw a man of about forty, very tall

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

and rather stout, with a very dark moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, kept fastened upon me a pair of eyes dilated with observation. Every now and then those eyes were shot through by a look of intense activity such as the sight of a person whom they do not know excites only in men to whom, for whatever reason, it suggests thoughts that would not occur to anyone else—madmen, for instance, or spies. He trained upon me a supreme stare at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy at the moment when one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, by an abrupt revolution of his whole body turned to examine a playbill on the wall in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss-rose in his buttonhole. He drew from his pocket a note-book in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked two or three times at his watch, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it like a visor, as though to see whether some one were at last coming, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to shew that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close except at the sides where he allowed a pair of waved "pigeon's-wings" to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people give who are not feeling too hot but would like it to be thought that they were. He gave me the impression of a "hotel crook" who had been watching my grandmother and myself for some days, and

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

while he was planning to rob us had just discovered that I had surprised him in the act of spying ; to put me off the scent, perhaps he was seeking only, by his new attitude, to express boredom and detachment, but it was with an exaggeration so aggressive that his object appeared to be—at least as much as the dissipating of the suspicions that I must have had of him—to avenge a humiliation which quite unconsciously I must have inflicted on him, to give me the idea not so much that he had not seen me as that I was an object of too little importance to attract his attention. He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, bit his lips, pushed up his moustache, and in the lens of his eyes made an adjustment of something that was indifferent, harsh, almost insulting. So effectively that the singularity of his expression made me take him at one moment for a thief and at another for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and gave a reassurance to my own suit, so often humiliated by the dazzling and commonplace whiteness of their holiday garb. But my grandmother was coming towards me, we took a turn together, and I was waiting for her, an hour later, outside the hotel into which she had gone for a moment, when I saw emerge from it Mme. de Villeparisis with Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me so intently outside the Casino. Swift as a lightning-flash his look shot through me, just as at the moment when I first noticed him, and returned, as though he had not seen me, to hover, slightly lowered, before his eyes, dulled, like the neutral look which feigns to see nothing without and is incapable of reporting anything to the mind within, the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

look which expresses merely the satisfaction of feeling round it the eyelids which it cleaves apart with its sanctimonious roundness, the devout, the steeped look that we see on the faces of certain hypocrites, the smug look on those of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes. The suit he was wearing was darker even than the other ; and no doubt this was because the true distinction in dress lies nearer to simplicity than the false ; but there was something more ; when one came near him one felt that if colour was almost entirely absent from these garments it was not because he who had banished it from them was indifferent to it but rather because for some reason he forbade himself the enjoyment of it. And the sobriety which they displayed seemed to be of the kind that comes from obedience to a rule of diet rather than from want of appetite. A dark green thread harmonised, in the stuff of his trousers, with the clock on his socks, with a refinement which betrayed the vivacity of a taste that was everywhere else conquered, to which this single concession had been made out of tolerance for such a weakness, while a spot of red on his necktie was imperceptible, like a liberty which one dares not take.

“How are you ? Let me introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes,” Mme. de Villeparisis greeted me, while the stranger without looking at me, muttering a vague “Charmed !” which he followed with a “H’m, h’m, h’m” to give his affability an air of having been forced, and doubling back his little finger, forefinger and thumb, held out to me his middle and ring fingers, the latter bare of any ring, which I clasped through his suede glove ; then, without lifting his eyes to my face, he turned towards Mme. de Villeparisis.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

"Good gracious ; I shall be forgetting my own name next !" she exclaimed. "Here am I calling you Baron de Guermantes. Let me introduce the Baron de Charlus. After all, it's not a very serious mistake," she went on, "for you're a thorough Guermantes whatever else you are."

By this time my grandmother had reappeared, and we all set out together. Saint-Loup's uncle declined to honour me not only with a word, with so much as a look, even, in my direction. If he stared strangers out of countenance (and during this short excursion he two or three times hurled his terrible and searching scrutiny like a sounding lead at insignificant people of obviously humble extraction who happened to pass), to make up for that he never for a moment, if I was to judge by myself, looked at the people whom he did know, just as a detective on special duty might except his personal friends from his professional vigilance. Leaving them, my grandmother, Mme. de Villeparisis and him to talk to one another, I fell behind with Saint-Loup.

"Tell me, am I right in thinking I heard Mme. de Villeparisis say just now to your uncle that he was a Guermantes ?"

"Of course he is ; Palamède de Guermantes."

"Not the same Guermantes who have a place near Combray, and claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant ?"

"Most certainly : my uncle, who is the very last word in heraldry and all that sort of thing, would tell you that our 'cry', our war-cry, that is to say, which was changed afterwards to 'Passavant' was originally 'Combraysis', he said, smiling so as not to appear to be priding himself on this prerogative of a "cry", which only the semi-royal

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

houses, the great chiefs of feudal bands enjoyed. "It's his brother who has the place now."

And so she was indeed related, and quite closely, to the Guermantes, this Mme. de Villeparisis who had so long been for me the lady who had given me a duck filled with chocolates, when I was little, more remote then from the Guermantes way than if she had been shut up somewhere on the Méséglise, less brilliant, less highly placed by me than was the Combray optician, and who now suddenly went through one of those fantastic rises in value, parallel to the depreciations, no less unforeseen, of other objects in our possession, which—rise and fall alike—introduce in our youth and in those periods of our life in which a trace of youth persists changes as numerous as the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.

"Haven't they got, down there, the busts of all the old lords of Guermantes?"

"Yes; and a lovely sight they are!" Saint-Loup was ironical. "Between you and me, I look on all that sort of thing as rather a joke. But they have got at Guermantes, what is a little more interesting, and that is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez," went on Saint-Loup, who in his neophyte zeal was not always very exact about degrees of greatness. "There are also some moving pictures by Gustave Moreau. My aunt is the niece of your friend Mme. de Villeparisis; she was brought up by her, and married her cousin, who was a nephew, too, of my aunt Villeparisis, the present Duc de Guermantes."

"Then who is this uncle?"

"He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Properly speaking, when my great-uncle died, my uncle Palamède

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ought to have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which his brother used before he became Duc de Guermantes, for in that family they change their names as you'd change your shirt. But my uncle has peculiar ideas about all that sort of thing. And as he feels that people are rather apt to overdo the Italian Prince and Grandee of Spain business nowadays, though he had half-a-dozen titles of 'Prince' to choose from, he has remained Baron de Charlus, as a protest, and with an apparent simplicity which really covers a good deal of pride. 'In these days', he says, 'everybody is Prince something-or-other; one really must have a title that will distinguish one; I shall call myself Prince when I wish to travel incognito.' According to him there is no older title than the Charlus barony; to prove to you that it is earlier than the Montmorency title, though they used to claim, quite wrongly, to be the premier barons of France when they were only premier in the Ile-de-France, where their fief was, my uncle will explain to you for hours on end and enjoy doing it, because, although he's a most intelligent man, really gifted, he regards that sort of thing as quite a live topic of conversation," Saint-Loup smiled again. "But as I am not like him, you mustn't ask me to talk pedigrees; I know nothing more deadly, more perishing; really, life is not long enough."

I now recognised in the hard look which had made me turn round that morning outside the Casino the same that I had seen fixed on me at Tansonville, at the moment when Mme. Swann called Gilberte away.

"But, I say, all those mistresses that, you told me, your uncle M. de Charlus had had, wasn't Mme. Swann one of them?"

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

“Good lord, no ! That is to say, my uncle’s a great friend of Swann, and has always stood up for him. But no one has ever suggested that he was his wife’s lover. You would make a great sensation in Paris society if people thought you believed that.”

I dared not reply that it would have caused an even greater sensation in Combray society if people had thought that I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. No doubt he attached an extreme importance to all questions of birth and social position, and my grandmother had remarked this, but without any trace of that severity which as a rule embodies a secret envy and the annoyance of seeing some one else enjoy an advantage which one would like but cannot oneself possess. As on the other hand my grandmother, content with her lot and never for a moment regretting that she did not move in a more brilliant sphere, employed only her intellect in observing the eccentricities of M. de Charlus, she spoke of Saint-Loup’s uncle with that detached, smiling, almost affectionate kindness with which we reward the object of our disinterested study for the pleasure that it has given us, all the more that this time the object was a person with regard to whom she found that his if not legitimate, at any rate picturesque pretensions shewed him in vivid contrast to the people whom she generally had occasion to see. But it was especially in consideration of his intelligence and sensibility, qualities which it was easy to see that M. de Charlus, unlike so many of the people in society whom Saint-Loup derided, possessed in a marked degree, that my grandmother had so readily forgiven him his aristocratic prejudice. And

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

yet this had not been sacrificed by the uncle, as it was by the nephew, to higher qualities. Rather, M. de Charlus had reconciled it with them. Possessing, by virtue of his descent from the Ducs de Nemours and Princes de Lamballe, documents, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velasquez, Boucher, justified in saying that he was visiting a museum and a matchless library when he was merely turning over his family relics at home, he placed in the rank from which his nephew had degraded it the whole heritage of the aristocracy. Perhaps also, being less metaphysical than Saint-Loup, less satisfied with words, more of a realist in his study of men, he did not care to neglect a factor that was essential to his prestige in their eyes and, if it gave certain disinterested pleasures to his imagination, could often be a powerfully effective aid to his utilitarian activities. No agreement can ever be reached between men of his sort and those who obey the ideal within them which urges them to strip themselves bare of such advantages so that they may seek only to realise that ideal, similar in that respect to the painters, the writers who renounce their virtuosity, the artistic peoples who modernise themselves, warrior peoples who take the initiative in a move for universal disarmament, absolute governments which turn democratic and repeal their harsh laws, though as often as not the sequel fails to reward their noble effort ; for the men lose their talent, the nations their secular predominance ; " pacificism " often multiplies wars and indulgence criminality. If Saint-Loup's efforts towards sincerity and emancipation were only to be commended as most noble, to judge by their visible result, one could still be thankful that they had failed to bear fruit in M. de

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Charlus, who had transferred to his own home much of the admirable panelling from the Guermantes house, instead of substituting, like his nephew, a "modern style" of decoration, employing Lebourg or Guillaumin. It was none the less true that M. de Charlus's ideal was highly artificial, and, if the epithet can be applied to the word ideal, as much social as artistic. In certain women of great beauty and rare culture whose ancestresses, two centuries earlier, had shared in all the glory and grace of the old order, he found a distinction which made him take pleasure only in their society, and no doubt the admiration for them which he had protested was sincere, but countless reminiscences, historical and artistic, called forth by their names, entered into and formed a great part of it, just as suggestions of classical antiquity are one of the reasons for the pleasure which a booklover finds in reading an Ode of Horace that is perhaps inferior to poems of our own day which would leave the same booklover cold. Any of these women by the side of a pretty commoner was for him what are, hanging beside a contemporary canvas representing a procession or a wedding, those old pictures the history of which we know, from the Pope or King who ordered them, through the hands of people whose acquisition of them, by gift, purchase, conquest or inheritance, recalls to us some event or at least some alliance of historic interest, and consequently some knowledge that we ourselves have acquired, gives it a fresh utility, increases our sense of the richness of the possessions of our memory or of our erudition. M. de Charlus might be thankful that a prejudice similar to his own, by preventing these several great ladies from mixing with women whose blood was less pure, presented them for his

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

veneration unspoiled, in their unaltered nobility, like an eighteenth-century house-front supported on its flat column of pink marbles, in which the passage of time has wrought no change.

M. de Charlus praised the true "nobility" of mind and heart which characterised these women, playing upon the word in a double sense by which he himself was taken in, and in which lay the falsehood of this bastard conception, of this medley of aristocracy, generosity and art, but also its seductiveness, dangerous to people like my grandmother, to whom the less refined but more innocent prejudice of a nobleman who cared only about quarterings and took no thought for anything besides would have appeared too silly for words, whereas she was defenceless as soon as a thing presented itself under the externals of a mental superiority, so much so, indeed, that she regarded Princes as enviable above all other men because they were able to have a Labruyère, a Fénelon as their tutors. Outside the Grand Hotel the three Guermantes left us ; they were going to luncheon with the Princesse de Luxembourg. While my grandmother was saying good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup to my grandmother, M. de Charlus who, so far, had not uttered a word to me, drew back a little way from the group and, when he reached my side, said : " I shall be taking tea this evening after dinner in my aunt Villeparisis's room ; I hope that you will give me the pleasure of seeing you there, and your grandmother." With which he rejoined the Marquise.

Although it was Sunday there were no more carriages waiting outside the hotel now than at the beginning of the season. The solicitor's wife, in particular, had decided

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

that it was not worth the expense of hiring one every time simply because she was not going to the Cambremers', and contented herself with staying in her room.

"Is Mme. Blandais not well?" her husband was asked. "We haven't seen her all day."

"She has a slight headache ; it's the heat, there's thunder coming. The least thing upsets her ; but I expect you will see her this evening ; I've told her she ought to come down. It can't do her any harm."

I had supposed that in thus inviting us to take tea with his aunt, whom I never doubted that he would have warned that we were coming, M. de Charlus wished to make amends for the impoliteness which he had shewn me during our walk that morning. But when, on our entering Mme. de Villeparisis's room, I attempted to greet her nephew, even although I walked right round him, while in shrill accents he was telling a somewhat spiteful story about one of his relatives, I did not succeed in catching his eye ; I decided to say "Good evening" to him, and fairly loud, to warn him of my presence ; but I realised that he had observed it, for before ever a word had passed my lips, just as I began to bow to him, I saw his two fingers stretched out for me to shake without his having turned to look at me or paused in his story. He had evidently seen me, without letting it appear that he had, and I noticed then that his eyes, which were never fixed on the person to whom he was speaking, strayed perpetually in all directions, like those of certain animals when they are frightened, or those of street hawkers who, while they are bawling their patter and displaying their illicit merchandise, keep a sharp look-out, though without turning their heads, on the different points of the horizon,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

from any of which may appear, suddenly, the police. At the same time I was a little surprised to find that Mme. de Villeparisis, while glad to see us, did not seem to have been expecting us, and I was still more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother : “ Ah ! that was a capital idea of yours to come and pay us a visit ; charming of them, is it not, my dear aunt ? ” No doubt he had noticed his aunt’s surprise at our entry and thought, as a man accustomed to set the tone, to strike the right note, that it would be enough to transform that surprise into joy were he to shew that he himself felt it, that it was indeed the feeling which our arrival there ought to have prompted. In which he calculated wisely ; for Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a high opinion of her nephew and knew how difficult it was to please him, appeared suddenly to have found new attractions in my grandmother and continued to make much of her. But I failed to understand how M. de Charlus could, in the space of a few hours, have forgotten the invitation—so curt but apparently so intentional, so premeditated—which he had addressed to me that same morning, or why he called a “ capital idea ” on my grandmother’s part an idea that had been entirely his own. With a scruple of accuracy which I retained until I had reached the age at which I realised that it is not by asking him questions that one learns the truth of what another man has had in his mind, and that the risk of a misunderstanding which will probably pass unobserved is less than that which may come from a purblind insistence : “ But, sir,” I reminded him, “ you remember, surely, that it was you who asked me if we would come in this evening ? ” Not a sound, not a movement betrayed that M. de Charlus had so much

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

as heard my question. Seeing which I repeated it, like a diplomat, or like young men after a misunderstanding who endeavour, with untiring and unrewarded zeal, to obtain an explanation which their adversary is determined not to give them. Still M. de Charlus answered me not a word. I seemed to see hovering upon his lips the smile of those who from a great height pass judgment on the characters and breeding of their inferiors.

Since he refused to give any explanation, I tried to provide one for myself, but succeeded only in hesitating between several, none of which could be the right one. Perhaps he did not remember, or perhaps it was I who had failed to understand what he had said to me that morning. . . . More probably, in his pride, he did not wish to appear to have sought to attract people whom he despised, and preferred to cast upon them the responsibility for their intrusion. But then, if he despised us, why had he been so anxious that we should come, or rather that my grandmother should come, for of the two of us it was to her alone that he spoke that evening, and never once to me. Talking with the utmost animation to her, as also to Mme. de Villeparisis, hiding, so to speak, behind them, as though he were seated at the back of a theatre-box, he contented himself, turning from them every now and then the exploring gaze of his penetrating eyes, with fastening it on my face, with the same gravity, the same air of preoccupation as if my face had been a manuscript difficult to decipher.

No doubt, if he had not had those eyes, the face of M. de Charlus would have been similar to the faces of many good-looking men. And when Saint-Loup, speaking to me of various other Guermantes, on a later oc-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

casion, said : "Gad, they've not got that thoroughbred air, of being gentlemen to their finger-tips, that uncle Palamède has !" confirming my suspicion that a thoroughbred air and aristocratic distinction were not anything mysterious and new but consisted in elements which I had recognised, without difficulty and without receiving any particular impression from them, I was to feel that another of my illusions had been shattered. But that face, to which a faint layer of powder gave almost the appearance of a face on the stage, in vain might M. de Charlus hermetically seal its expression ; his eyes were like two crevices, two loopholes which alone he had failed to stop, and through which, according to where one stood or sat in relation to him, one felt suddenly flash across one the glow of some internal engine which seemed to offer no reassurance even to him who without being altogether master of it must carry it inside him, at an unstable equilibrium and always on the point of explosion ; and the circumspect and unceasingly restless expression of those eyes, with all the signs of exhaustion which, extending from them to a pair of dark rings quite low down upon his cheeks, were stamped on his face, however carefully he might compose and regulate it, made one think of some *incognito*, some disguise assumed by a powerful man in danger, or merely by a dangerous—but tragic—person. I should have liked to divine what was this secret which other men did not carry in their breasts and which had already made M. de Charlus's gaze so enigmatic to me when I had seen him that morning outside the Casino. But with what I now knew of his family I could no longer believe that they were the eyes of a thief, nor, after what I had heard of his conversation,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

could I say that they were those of a madman. If he was cold with me, while making himself agreeable to my grandmother, that arose perhaps not from a personal antipathy for, generally speaking, just as he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he used to speak without, as a rule, any narrowing of the broadest tolerance, so he shewed with regard to men, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain extreme misogynists for women. Two or three "carpet-knights", relatives or intimate friends of Saint-Loup who happened to mention their names, M. de Charlus, with an almost ferocious expression, in sharp contrast to his usual coldness, called : "Little cads !" I gathered that the particular fault which he found in the young men of the period was their extreme effeminacy. "They're absolute women," he said with scorn. But what life would not have appeared effeminate beside that which he expected a man to lead, and never found energetic or virile enough ? (He himself, when he walked across country, after long hours on the road would plunge his heated body into frozen streams.) He would not even allow a man to wear a single ring. But this profession of virility did not prevent his having also the most delicate sensibilities. When Mme. de Villeparisis asked him to describe to my grandmother some country house in which Mme. de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she could not help feeling that there was something rather "literary" about that lady's distress at being parted from "that tiresome Mme. de Grignan" :

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I can think of nothing more true. Besides, it was a time in which feelings of that sort were thoroughly understood. The inhabitant

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

of Lafontaine's Monomotapa, running to see his friend who had appeared to him in a dream, and had looked sad, the pigeon finding that the greatest of evils is the absence of the other pigeon, seem to you perhaps, my dear aunt, as exaggerated as Mme. de Sévigné's impatience for the moment when she will be alone with her daughter. It is so fine what she says when she leaves her : ' This parting gives a pain to my soul which I feel like an ache in my body. In absence one is liberal with the hours. One anticipates a time for which one is longing.' " My grandmother was in ecstasies at hearing the Letters thus spoken of, exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was astonished that a man could understand them so thoroughly. She found in M. de Charlus a delicacy, a sensibility that were quite feminine. We said to each other afterwards, when we were by ourselves and began to discuss him together, that he must have come under the strong influence of a woman, his mother, or in later life his daughter if he had any children. " A mistress, perhaps," I thought to myself, remembering the influence that Saint-Loup's seemed to have had over him, which enabled me to realise the point to which men can be refined by the women with whom they live.

" Once she was with her daughter, she had probably nothing to say to her," put in Mme. de Villeparisis.

" Most certainly she had : if it was only what she calls ' things so slight that nobody else would notice them but you and me.' And anyhow she was with her. And Labruyère tells us that that is everything. ' To be with the people one loves, to speak to them, not to speak to them, it is all the same.' He is right ; that is the only form of happiness," added M. de Charlus in a mournful voice,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

"and that happiness—alas, life is so ill arranged that ~~one~~ very rarely tastes it ; Mme. de Sévigné was after all less to be pitied than most of us. She spent a great part of her life with the person whom she loved."

"You forget that it was not 'love' in her case ; the person was her daughter."

"But what matters in life is not whom or what one loves," he went on, in a judicial, peremptory, almost a cutting tone ; "it is the fact of loving. What Mme. de Sévigné felt for her daughter has a far better claim to rank with the passion that Racine described in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the commonplace relations young Sévigné had with his mistresses. It's the same with a mystic's love for his God. The hard and fast lines with which we circumscribe love arise solely from our complete ignorance of life."

"You think all that of *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, do you ?" Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a faintly contemptuous tone. "There is more truth in a single tragedy of Racine than in all the dramatic works of Monsieur Victor Hugo," replied M. de Charlus. "People really are overwhelming," Saint-Loup murmured in my ear. "Preferring Racine to Victor, you may say what you like, it's epoch-making !" He was genuinely distressed by his uncle's words, but the satisfaction of saying "you may say what you like" and, better still, "epoch-making" consoled him.

In these reflexions upon the sadness of having to live apart from the person whom one loves (which were to lead my grandmother to say to me that Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew understood certain things quite as well as his aunt, but in a different way, and moreover had

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

something about him that set him far above the average club man) M. de Charlus not only allowed a refinement of feeling to appear such as men rarely shew ; his voice itself, like certain contralto voices which have not been properly trained to the right pitch, so that when they sing it sounds like a duet between a young man and a woman, singing alternately, mounted, when he expressed these delicate sentiments, to its higher notes, took on an unexpected sweetness and seemed to be embodying choirs of betrothed maidens, of sisters, who poured out the treasures of their love. But the bevy of young girls, whom M. de Charlus in his horror of every kind of effeminacy would have been so distressed to learn that he gave the impression of sheltering thus within his voice, did not confine themselves to the interpretation, the modulation of scraps of sentiment. Often while M. de Charlus was talking one could hear their laughter, shrill, fresh laughter of school-girls or coquettes quizzing their partners with all the archness of clever tongues and pretty wits.

He told us how a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Lenôtre, was now in the hands of the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. "Israel—at least that is the name these people go by, which seems to me a generic, a racial term rather than a proper name. One cannot tell ; possibly people of that sort do not have names, and are designated only by the collective title of the tribe to which they belong. It is of no importance ! But fancy, after being a home of the Guermantes, to belong to Israels ! ! !" His voice rose. "It reminds me of a room in the Château of Blois where the caretaker who

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

was shewing me over said : ‘ This is where Mary Stuart used to say her prayers ; I use it to keep my brooms in.’ Naturally I wish to know nothing more of this house that has let itself be dishonoured, any more than of my cousin Clara de Chimay after she left her husband. But I keep a photograph of the house, when it was ‘ still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shews us things that no longer exist. I could give you a copy, since you are interested in that style of architecture,” he said to my grandmother. At that moment, noticing that the embroidered handkerchief which he had in his pocket was shewing some coloured threads, he thrust it sharply down out of sight with the scandalised air of a prudish but far from innocent lady concealing attractions which, by an excess of scrupulosity, she regards as indecent. “ Would you believe,” he went on, “ that the first thing the creatures did was to destroy Lenôtre’s park, which is as bad as slashing a picture by Poussin ? For that alone, these Israels ought to be in prison. It is true,” he added with a smile, after a moment’s silence, “ that there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be there ! In any case, you can imagine the effect, with that architecture behind it, of an English garden.”

“ But the house is in the same style as the Petit Trianon,” said Mme. de Villeparisis, “ and Marie-Antoinette had an English garden laid out there.”

“ Which, all the same, ruins Gabriel’s front ; ” replied M. de Charlus. “ Obviously, it would be an act of van-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

dalism now to destroy the Hameau. But whatever may be the spirit of the age, I doubt, all the same, whether, in that respect, a whim of Mme. Israel has the same importance as the memory of the Queen."

Meanwhile my grandmother had been making signs to me to go up to bed, in spite of the urgent appeals of Saint-Loup who, to my utter confusion, had alluded in front of M. de Charlus to the depression that used often to come upon me at night before I went to sleep, which his uncle must regard as betokening a sad want of virility. I lingered a few moments still, then went upstairs, and was greatly surprised when, a little later, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and asked who was there, I heard the voice of M. de Charlus saying dryly :

"It is Charlus. May I come in, sir ? Sir," he began again in the same tone as soon as he had shut the door, "my nephew was saying just now that you were apt to be worried at night before going to sleep, and also that you were an admirer of Bergotte's books. As I had one here in my luggage which you probably do not know, I have brought it to help you to while away these moments in which you are not comfortable."

I thanked M. de Charlus with some warmth and told him that, on the contrary, I had been afraid that what Saint-Loup had said to him about my discomfort when night came would have made me appear in his eyes more stupid even than I was.

"No ; why ?" he answered, in a gentler voice. "You have not, perhaps, any personal merit ; so few of us have ! But for a time at least you have youth, and that is always a charm. Besides, sir, the greatest folly of all is to laugh at or to condemn in others what one does not

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

happen oneself to feel. I love the night, and you tell me that you are afraid of it. I love the scent of roses, and I have a friend whom it throws into a fever. Do you suppose that I think, for that reason, that he is inferior to me? I try to understand everything and I take care to condemn nothing. After all, you must not be too sorry for yourself; I do not say that these moods of depression are not painful, I know that one can be made to suffer by things which the world would not understand. But at least you have placed your affection wisely, in your grandmother. You see a great deal of her. And besides, that is a legitimate affection, I mean one that is repaid. There are so many of which one cannot say that."

He began walking up and down the room, looking at one thing, taking up another. I had the impression that he had something to tell me, and could not find the right words to express it.

"I have another volume of Bergotte here; I will fetch it for you," he went on, and rang the bell. Presently a page came. "Go and find me your head waiter. He is the only person here who is capable of obeying an order intelligently," said M. de Charlus stiffly. "Monsieur Aimé, sir?" asked the page. "I cannot tell you his name; yes, I remember now, I did hear him called Aimé. Run along, I am in a hurry." "He won't be a minute, sir, I saw him downstairs just now," said the page, anxious to appear efficient. There was an interval of silence. The page returned. "Sir, M. Aimé has gone to bed. But I can take your message." "No, you have only to get him out of bed." "But I can't do that, sir; he doesn't sleep here." "Then you can leave us alone." "But, sir," I said when the page had gone, "you are too

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

kind ; one volume of Bergotte will be quite enough.” “That is just what I was thinking.” M. de Charlús walked up and down the room. Several minutes passed in this way, then after a prolonged hesitation, and several false starts, he swung sharply round and, his voice once more stinging, flung at me : “Good night, sir !” and left the room. After all the lofty sentiments which I had heard him express that evening, next day, which was the day of his departure, on the beach, before noon, when I was on my way down to bathe, and M. de Charlus had come across to tell me that my grandmother was waiting for me to join her as soon as I left the water, I was greatly surprised to hear him say, pinching my neck as he spoke, with a familiarity and a laugh that were frankly vulgar :

“But he doesn’t give a damn for his old grandmother, does he, eh ? Little rascal !”

“What, sir ! I adore her !”

“Sir,” he said, stepping back a pace, and with a glacial air, “you are still young ; you should profit by your youth to learn two things ; first, to refrain from expressing sentiments that are too natural not to be taken for granted ; and secondly not to dash into speech to reply to things that are said to you before you have penetrated their meaning. If you had taken this precaution a moment ago you would have saved yourself the appearance of speaking at cross-purposes like a deaf man, thereby adding a second absurdity to that of having anchors embroidered on your bathing-dress. I have lent you a book by Bergotte which I require. See that it is brought to me within the next hour by that head waiter with the silly and inappropriate name, who, I suppose, is not in

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

bed at this time of day. You make me see that I was premature in speaking to you last night of the charms of youth ; I should have done you a better service had I pointed out to you its thoughtlessness, its inconsequence, and its want of comprehension. I hope, sir, that this little douche will be no less salutary to you than your bathe. But don't let me keep you standing : you may catch cold. Good day, sir."

No doubt he was sorry afterwards for this speech, for some time later I received—in a morocco binding on the front of which was inlaid a panel of tooled leather representing in demi-relief a spray of forget-me-not—the book which he had lent me, and I had sent back to him, not by Aimé who was apparently "off duty", but by the lift-boy.

M. de Charlus having gone, Robert and I were free at last to dine with Bloch. And I realised during this little party that the stories too readily admitted by our friend as funny were favourite stories of M. Bloch senior, and that the son's "really remarkable person" was always one of his father's friends whom he had so classified. There are a certain number of people whom we admire in our boyhood, a father with better brains than the rest of the family, a teacher who acquires credit in our eyes from the philosophy he reveals to us, a schoolfellow more advanced than we are (which was what Bloch had been to me), who despises the Musset of the *Espoir en Dieu* when we still admire it, and when we have reached Leconte or Claudel will be in ecstasies only over :

A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise :

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

with which he will include :

Padoue est un fort bel endroit
Où de très grands docteurs en droit. . . .
Mais j'aime mieux la polenta. . . .
Passe dans mon domino noir
La Toppatelle

and of all the *Nuits* will remember only :

Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique
A Venise, à l'affreux Lido.
Où vient sur l'herbe d'un tombeau
Mourir la pâle Adriatique.

So, whenever we confidently admire anyone, we collect from him, we quote with admiration sayings vastly inferior to the sort which, left to our own judgment, we would sternly reject, just as the writer of a novel puts into it, on the pretext that they are true, things which people have actually said, which in the living context are like a dead weight, form the dull part of the work. Saint-Simon's portraits composed by himself (and very likely without his admiring them himself) are admirable, whereas what he cites as the charming wit of his clever friends is frankly dull where it has not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so pointed or so coloured when said by Mme. Cornuel or Louis XIV, a point which is to be remarked also in many other writers, and is capable of various interpretations, of which it is enough to note but one for the present : namely, that in the state of mind in which we "observe" we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create.

There was, then, embedded in my friend Bloch a father

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Bloch who lagged forty years behind his son, told impossible stories and laughed as loudly at them from the heart of my friend as did the separate, visible and authentic father Bloch, since to the laugh which the latter emitted, not without several times repeating the last word so that his public might taste the full flavour of the story, was added the braying laugh with which the son never failed, at table, to greet his father's anecdotes. Thus it came about that after saying the most intelligent things young Bloch, to indicate the portion that he had inherited from his family, would tell us for the thirtieth time some of the gems which father Bloch brought out only (with his swallow-tail coat) on the solemn occasions on which young Bloch brought someone to the house on whom it was worth while making an impression ; one of his masters, a "chum" who had taken all the prizes, or, this evening, Saint-Loup and myself. For instance : "A military critic of great insight, who had brilliantly worked out, supporting them with proofs, the reasons for which, in the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese must inevitably be beaten and the Russians victorious," or else : "He is an eminent gentleman who passes for a great financier in political circles and for a great politician among financiers." These stories were interchangeable with one about Baron de Rothschild and one about Sir Rufus Isaacs, who were brought into the conversation in an equivocal manner which might let it be supposed that M. Bloch knew them personally.

I was myself taken in, and from the way in which M. Bloch spoke of Bergotte I assumed that he too was an old friend. But with him as with all famous people, M. Bloch knew them only "without actually knowing them",

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

from having seen them at a distance in the theatre or in the street. He imagined, moreover, that his appearance, his name, his personality were not unknown to them, and that when they caught sight of him they had often to repress a stealthy inclination to bow. People in society, because they know men of talent, original characters, and have them to dine in their houses, do not on that account understand them any better. But when one has lived to some extent in society, the silliness of its inhabitants makes one too anxious to live, suppose too high a standard of intelligence in the obscure circles in which people know only "without actually knowing". I was to discover this when I introduced the topic of Bergotte. M. Bloch was not the only one who was a social success at home. My friend was even more so with his sisters, whom he continually questioned in a hectoring tone, burying his face in his plate, all of which made them laugh until they cried. They had adopted their brother's language, and spoke it fluently, as if it had been obligatory and the only form of speech that people of intelligence might use. When we arrived, the eldest sister said to one of the younger ones: "Go, tell our sage father and our venerable mother!" "Puppies," said Bloch, "I present to you the cavalier Saint-Loup, hurler of javelins, who is come for a few days from Doncières to the dwellings of polished stone, fruitful in horses." And, since he was as vulgar as he was literary, his speech ended as a rule in some pleasantry of a less Homeric kind: "See, draw closer your pepla with fair clasps, what is all that that I see? Does your mother know you're out?" And the misses Bloch subsided in a tempest of laughter. I told

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I had loved.

M. Bloch senior, who knew Bergotte only by sight, and Bergotte's life only from what was common gossip, had a manner quite as indirect of making the acquaintance of his books, by the help of criticisms that were apparently literary. He lived in the world of "very nearlies", where people salute the empty air and arrive at wrong judgments. Inexactitude, incompetence do not modify their assurance; quite the contrary. It is the propitious miracle of self-esteem that, since few of us are in a position to enjoy the society of distinguished people, or to form intellectual friendships, those to whom they are denied still believe themselves to be the best endowed of men, because the optics of our social perspective make every grade of society seem the best to him who occupies it, and beholds as less favoured than himself, less fortunate and therefore to be pitied, the greater men whom he names and calumniates without knowing, judges and despises without understanding them. Even in cases where the multiplication of his modest personal advantages by his self-esteem would not suffice to assure a man the dose of happiness, superior to that accorded to others, which is essential to him, envy is always there to make up the balance. It is true that if envy finds expression in scornful phrases, we must translate "I have no wish to know him" by "I have no means of knowing him." That is the intellectual sense. But the emotional sense is indeed, "I have no wish to know him." The speaker knows that it is not true, but he does not, all the same, say it simply to de-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ceive ; he says it because it is what he feels, and that is sufficient to bridge the gulf between them, that is to say, to make him happy.

Self-centredness thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in a descending scale beneath himself who is its lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being pitiless when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's signature at the foot of an article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted the writer an audience soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: "That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable. My word, what a bore the creature can be. I really must stop my subscription. How involved it all is, bread and butter nonsense!" And he helped himself to another slice.

This illusory importance of M. Bloch senior did, moreover, extend some little way beyond the radius of his own perceptions. In the first place his children regarded him as a superior person. Children have always a tendency either to depreciate or to exalt their parents, and to a good son his father is always the best of fathers, quite apart from any objective reason there may be for admiring him. Now, such reasons were not altogether lacking in the case of M. Bloch, who was an educated man, shrewd, affectionate towards his family. In his most intimate circle they were all the more proud of him because, if, in "society", people are judged by a standard (which is incidentally absurd) and according to false but fixed rules, by comparison with the aggregate of all the other fashionable people, in the subdivisions of middle class life,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

on the other hand, the dinners, the family parties all turn upon certain people who are pronounced good company, amusing, and who in "society" would not survive a second evening. Moreover in such an environment where the artificial values of the aristocracy do not exist, their place is taken by distinctions even more stupid. Thus it was that in his family circle, and even among the remotest branches of the tree, an alleged similarity in his way of wearing his moustache and in the bridge of his nose led to M. Bloch's being called "the Duc d'Aumale's double". (In the world of club pages, the one who wears his cap on one side and his jacket tightly buttoned, so as to give himself the appearance, he imagines, of a foreign officer, is he not also a personage of a sort to his comrades ?)

The resemblance was the faintest, but you would have said that it conferred a title. When he was mentioned, it would always be : "Bloch ? Which one ? The Duc d'Aumale ?" as people say "Princesse Murat ? Which one ? The Queen (of Naples) ?" And there were certain other minute marks which combined to give him, in the eyes of the cousinhood, an acknowledged claim to distinction. Not going the length of having a carriage of his own, M. Bloch used on special occasions to hire an open victoria with a pair of horses from the Company, and would drive through the Bois de Boulogne, his body sprawling limply from side to side, two fingers pressed to his brow, other two supporting his chin, and if people who did not know him concluded that he was an "old nuisance", they were all convinced, in the family, that for smartness Uncle Solomon could have taught Gramont-Caderousse a thing or two. He was one of those people

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

who when they die, because for years they have shared a table in a restaurant on the boulevard with its news-editor, are described as "well known Paris figures" in the social column of the *Radical*. M. Bloch told Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte knew so well why he, M. Bloch, always cut him that as soon as he caught sight of him, at the theatre or in the club, he avoided his eye. Saint-Loup blushed, for it had occurred to him that this club could not be the Jockey, of which his father had been chairman. On the other hand it must be a fairly exclusive club, for M. Bloch had said that Bergotte would never have got into it if he had come up now. So it was not without the fear that he might be "underrating his adversary" that Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question were the Rue Royale, which was considered "lowering" by his own family, and to which he knew that certain Israelites had been admitted. "No," replied M. Bloch in a tone at once careless, proud and ashamed, "it is a small club, but far more pleasant than a big one, the Ganaches. We're very strict there, don't you know." "Isn't Sir Rufus Israels the chairman?" Bloch junior asked his father, so as to give him the opportunity for a glorious lie, never suspecting that the financier had not the same eminence in Saint-Loup's eyes as in his. The fact of the matter was that the Ganaches club boasted not Sir Rufus Israels but one of his staff. But as this man was on the best of terms with his employer, he had at his disposal a stock of the financier's cards, and would give one to M. Bloch whenever he wished to travel on a line of which Sir Rufus was a director, the result of which was that old Bloch would say: "I'm just going round to the Club to ask Sir Rufus for a line to the Company."

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

And the card enabled him to dazzle the guards on the trains. The misses Bloch were more interested in Bergotte and, reverting to him rather than pursue the subject of the Ganaches, the youngest asked her brother, in the most serious tone imaginable, for she believed that there existed in the world, for the designation of men of talent, no other terms than those which he was in the habit of using: "Is he really an amazing good egg, this Bergotte? Is he in the category of the great lads, good eggs like Villiers and Catullus?" "I've met him several times at dress rehearsals," said M. Nissim Bernard. "He is an uncouth creature, a sort of Schlemihl." There was nothing very serious in this allusion to Chamisso's story but the epithet "Schlemihl" formed part of that dialect, half-German, half-Jewish, the use of which delighted M. Bloch in the family circle, but struck him as vulgar and out of place before strangers. And so he cast a reproving glance at his uncle. "He has talent," said Bloch. "Ah!" His sister sighed gravely, as though to imply that in that case there was some excuse for me. "All writers have talent," said M. Bloch scornfully. "In fact it appears," went on his son, raising his fork, and screwing up his eyes with an air of impish irony, "that he is going to put up for the Academy." "Go on. He hasn't enough to shew them," replied his father, who seemed not to have for the Academy the same contempt as his son and daughters. "He's not big enough." "Besides, the Academy is a salon, and Bergotte has no polish," declared the uncle (whose heiress Mme. Bloch was), a mild and inoffensive person whose surname, Bernard, might perhaps by itself have quickened my grandfather's pow-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ers of diagnosis, but would have appeared too little in harmony with a face which looked as if it had been brought back from Darius's palace and restored by Mme. Dieulafoy, had not (chosen by some collector desirous of giving a crowning touch of orientalism to this figure from Susa) his first name, Nissim, stretched out above it the pinions of an androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. But M. Bloch never stopped insulting his uncle, whether it was that he was excited by the unresisting good-humour of his butt, or that the rent of the villa being paid by M. Nissim Bernard, the beneficiary wished to shew that he kept his independence, and, more important still, that he was not seeking by flattery to make sure of the rich inheritance to come. What most hurt the old man was being treated so rudely in front of the manservant. He murmured an unintelligible sentence of which all that could be made out was : "when the meschores are in the room". "Meschores", in the Bible, means "the servant of God". In the family circle the Blochs used the word when they referred to their own servants, and were always exhilarated by it, because their certainty of not being understood either by Christians or by the servants themselves enhanced in M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch their twofold distinction of being "masters" and at the same time "Jews". But this latter source of satisfaction became a source of displeasure when there was "company". At such times M. Bloch, hearing his uncle say "meschores", felt that he was making his oriental side too prominent, just as a light-of-love who has invited some of her sisters to meet her respectable friends is annoyed if they allude to their profession or use words that do not sound quite nice. Therefore, so far from his

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

uncle's request's producing any effect on M. Bloch, he, beside himself with rage, could contain himself no longer. He let no opportunity pass of scarifying his wretched uncle. "Of course, when there is a chance of saying anything stupid, one can be quite certain that you won't miss it. You would be the first to lick his boots if he were in the room!" shouted M. Bloch, while M. Nissim Bernard in sorrow lowered over his plate the ringleted beard of King Sargôn. My friend, when he began to grow his beard, which also was blue-black and crimped, became very like his great-uncle.

"What! Are you the son of the Marquis de Marsantes? Why, I knew him very well," said M. Nissim Bernard to Saint-Loup. I supposed that he meant the word "knew" in the sense in which Bloch's father had said that he knew Bergotte, namely by sight. But he went on: "Your father was one of my best friends." Meanwhile Bloch had turned very red, his father was looking intensely cross, the misses Bloch were choking with suppressed laughter. The fact was that in M. Nissim Bernard the love of ostentation which in M. Bloch and his children was held in check, had engendered the habit of perpetual lying. For instance, if he was staying in an hotel, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch equally might have done, would have his newspapers brought to him always by his valet in the dining-room, in the middle of luncheon, when everybody was there, so that they should see that he travelled with a valet. But to the people with whom he made friends in the hotel the uncle used to say what the nephew would never have said, that he was a Senator. He might know quite well that they would sooner or later discover that the title was usurped; he

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

could not, at the critical moment, resist the temptation to assume it. M. Bloch suffered acutely from his uncle's lies and from all the embarrassments that they led to. "Don't pay any attention to him, he talks a great deal of nonsense," he whispered to Saint-Loup, whose interest was all the more whetted, for he was curious to explore the psychology of liars. "A greater liar even than the Ithacan Odysseus, albeit Athene called him the greatest liar among mortals," his son completed the indictment. "Well, upon my word!" cried M. Nissim Bernard, "If I'd only known that I was going to sit down to dinner with my old friend's son! Why, I have a photograph still of your father at home, in Paris, and any number of letters from him. He used always to call me 'uncle', nobody ever knew why. He was a charming man, sparkling. I remember so well a dinner I gave at Nice; there were Sardou, Labiche, Augier," "Molière, Racine, Corneille," M. Bloch added with sarcasm, while his son completed the tale of guests with "Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa." M. Nissim Bernard, cut to the quick, stopped short in his reminiscence, and, ascetically depriving himself of a great pleasure, remained silent until the end of dinner.

"Saint-Loup with helm of bronze," said Bloch, "have a piece more of this duck with thighs heavy with fat, over which the illustrious sacrificer of birds has spilled numerous libations of red wine."

As a rule, after bringing out from his store for the entertainment of a distinguished guest his anecdotes of Sir Rufus Isaacs and others, M. Bloch, feeling that he had succeeded in touching and melting his son's heart, would withdraw, so as not to spoil his effect in the eyes

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of the "big pot". If, however, there was an absolutely compelling reason, as for instance on the night when his son won his fellowship, M. Bloch would add to the usual string of anecdotes the following ironical reflexion which he ordinarily reserved for his own personal friends, so that young Bloch was extremely proud to see it produced for his : "The Government have acted unpardonably. They have forgotten to consult M. Coquelin ! M. Coquelin has let it be known that he is displeased." (M. Bloch prided himself on being a reactionary, with a contempt for theatrical people.)

But the misses Bloch and their brother reddened to the tips of their ears, so much impressed were they when Bloch senior, to shew that he could be regal to the last in his entertainment of his son's two 'chums', gave the order for champagne to be served, and announced casually that, as a treat for us, he had taken three stalls for the performance which a company from the Opéra-Comique was giving that evening at the Casino. He was sorry that he had not been able to get a box. They had all been taken. However, he had often been in the boxes, and really one saw and heard better down by the orchestra. All very well, only, if the defect of his son, that is to say the defect which his son believed to be invisible to other people, was coarseness, the father's was avarice. And so it was in a decanter that we were served with, under the name of champagne, a light sparkling wine, while under that of orchestra stalls he had taken three in the pit, which cost half as much, miraculously persuaded by the divine intervention of his defect that neither at table nor in the theatre (where the boxes were all empty) would the defect be noticed. When M. Bloch had let

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

us moisten our lips in the flat glasses which his son dignified with the style and title of "craters with deeply hollowed flanks", he made us admire a picture to which he was so much attached that he had brought it with him to Balbec. He told us that it was a Rubens. Saint-Loup asked innocently if it was signed. M. Bloch replied, blushing, that he had had the signature cut off to make it fit the frame, but that it made no difference, as he had no intention of selling the picture. Then he hurriedly bade us good-night, in order to bury himself in the *Journal Officiel*, back numbers of which littered the house, and which, he informed us, he was obliged to read carefully on account of his "parliamentary position" as to the precise nature of which, however, he gave us no enlightenment. "I shall take a muffler," said Bloch, "for Zephyrus and Boreas are disputing to which of them shall belong the fish-teeming sea, and should we but tarry a little after the show is over, we shall not be home before the first flush of Eos, the rosy-fingered. By the way," he asked Saint-Loup when we were outside, and I trembled, for I realised at once that it was of M. de Charlus that Bloch was speaking in that tone of irony, "who was that excellent old card dressed in black that I saw you walking with, the day before yesterday, on the beach?" "That was my uncle." Saint-Loup was ruffled. Unfortunately, a "floater" was far from seeming to Bloch a thing to be avoided. He shook with laughter. "Heartiest congratulations; I ought to have guessed; he has an excellent style, the most priceless dial of an old 'gaga' of the highest lineage." "You are absolutely mistaken; he is an extremely clever man," retorted Saint-Loup, now furious. "I am sorry about that; it makes him less com-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

plete. All the same, I should like very much to know him, for I flatter myself I could write some highly adequate pieces about old buffers like that. Just to see him go by, he's killing. But I should leave out of account the caricaturable side, which really is hardly worthy of an artist enamoured of the plastic beauty of phrases, of his mug, which (you'll forgive me) doubled me up for a moment with joyous laughter, and I should bring into prominence the aristocratic side of your uncle, who after all has a distinct bovine effect, and when one has finished laughing does impress one by his great air of style. But," he went on, addressing myself this time, "there is also a matter of a very different order about which I have been meaning to question you, and every time we are together, some god, blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to ask for a piece of information which might before now have been and is sure some day to be of the greatest use to me. Tell me, who was the lovely lady I saw you with in the Jardin d'Acclimatation accompanied by a gentleman whom I seem to know by sight and a little girl with long hair?" It had been quite plain to me at the time that Mme. Swann did not remember Bloch's name, since she had spoken of him by another, and had described my friend as being on the staff of some Ministry, as to which I had never since then thought of finding out whether he had joined it. But how came it that Bloch, who, according to what she then told me, had got himself introduced to her, was ignorant of her name? I was so much surprised that I stopped for a moment before answering. "Whoever she is," he went on, "heartily congratulations ; you can't have been bored with her. I picked her up a few days before that on the Zone

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

railway, where, speaking of zones, she was so kind as to undo hers for the benefit of your humble servant; I have never had such a time in my life, and we were just going to make arrangements to meet again when somebody she knew had the bad taste to get in at the last station but one." My continued silence did not appear to please Bloch. "I was hoping," he said, "thanks to you, to learn her address, so as to go there several times a week to taste in her arms the delights of Eros, dear to the gods ; but I do not insist since you seem pledged to discretion with respect to a professional who gave herself to me three times running, and in the most refined manner, between Paris and the Point-du-Jour. I am bound to see her again, some night."

I called upon Bloch after this dinner ; he returned my call, but I was out and he was seen asking for me by Françoise, who, as it happened, albeit he had visited us at Combray, had never set eyes on him until then. So that she knew only that one of "the gentlemen" who were friends of mine had looked in to see me, she did not know "with what object", dressed in a nondescript way, which had not made any particular impression upon her. Now though I knew quite well that certain of Françoise's social ideas must for ever remain impenetrable by me, ideas based, perhaps, partly upon confusions between words, between names which she had once and for all time mistaken for one another, I could not restrain myself, who had long since abandoned the quest for enlightenment in such cases, from seeking—and seeking, moreover, in vain—to discover what could be the immense significance that the name of Bloch had for Françoise. For no sooner had I mentioned to her that the young man

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

whom she had seen was M. Bloch than she recoiled several paces, so great were her stupor and disappointment. "What ! Is that M. Bloch ?" she cried, thunderstruck, as if so portentous a personage ought to have been endowed with an appearance which "made you know" as soon as you saw him that you were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth ; and, like some one who has discovered that an historical character is not "up to" the level of his reputation, she repeated in an impressed tone, in which I could detect latent, for future growth, the seeds of a universal scepticism : "What ! Is that M. Bloch ? Well, really, you would never think it, to look at him." She seemed also to bear me a grudge, as if I had always "overdone" the praise of Bloch to her. At the same time she was kind enough to add : "Well, he may be M. Bloch, and all that. I'm sure Master can say he's every bit as good."

She had presently, with respect to Saint-Loup, whom she worshipped, a disillusionment of a different kind and of less severity : she discovered that he was a Republican. Now for all that, when speaking, for instance, of the Queen of Portugal, she would say with that disrespect which is, among the people, the supreme form of respect : "Amélie, Philippe's sister," Françoise was a Royalist. But when it came to a Marquis ; a Marquis who had dazzled her at first sight, and who was for the Republic, seemed no longer real. And she shewed the same ill-humour as if I had given her a box which she had believed to be made of gold, and had thanked me for it effusively, and then a jeweller had revealed to her that it was only plated. She at once withdrew her esteem from Saint-Loup, but soon afterwards restored it to him, having reflected

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

that he could not, being the Marquis de Saint-Loup, be a Republican, that he was just pretending, in his own interest, for with such a Government as we had it might be a great advantage to him. From that moment her coldness towards him, her resentment towards myself ceased. And when she spoke of Saint-Loup she said: "He is a hypocrite," with a broad and friendly smile which made it clear that she "considered" him again just as much as when she first knew him, and that she had forgiven him.

As a matter of fact, Saint-Loup was absolutely sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, not being able to find entire satisfaction in a selfish sentiment such as love, nor on the other hand meeting in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of finding its spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in himself, rendered him truly capable (just as I was incapable) of friendship.

Françoise was no less mistaken about Saint-Loup when she complained that he had "that sort of" air, as if he did not look down upon the people, but that it was all just a pretence, and you had only to see him when he was in a temper with his groom. It had indeed sometimes happened that Robert would scold his groom with a certain amount of brutality, which proved that he had the sense not so much of the difference as of the equality between classes and masses. "But," he said in answer to my rebuke of his having treated the man rather harshly, "why should I go out of my way to speak politely to him? Isn't he my equal? Isn't he just as near to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think that I ought to treat him with respect, as an inferior. You talk like an aristocrat!" he added scornfully.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

And indeed if there was a class to which he shewed himself prejudiced and hostile, it was the aristocracy, so much so that he found it as hard to believe in the superior qualities of a man in society as he found it easy to believe in those of a man of the people. When I mentioned the *Princesse de Luxembourg*, whom I had met with his aunt :

"An old trout," was his comment. "Like all that lot. She's a sort of cousin of mine, by the way."

Having a strong prejudice against the people who frequented it, he went rarely into "Society", and the contemptuous or hostile attitude which he adopted towards it served to increase, among all his near relatives, the painful impression made by his intimacy with a woman on the stage, a connexion which, they declared, would be his ruin, blaming it specially for having bred in him that spirit of *démigrat*ion, that bad spirit, and for having led him astray, after which it was only a matter of time before he would have dropped out altogether. And so, many easy-going men of the *Faubourg Saint-Germain* were without compunction when they spoke of Robert's mistress. "Those girls do their job," they would say, "they are as good as anybody else. But that one ; no, thank you ! We cannot forgive her. She has done too much harm to a fellow we were fond of." Of course, he was not the first to be caught in that snare. But the others amused themselves like men of the world, continued to think like men of the world about politics, about everything. As for him, his family found him "soured". They did not bear in mind that, for many young men of fashion who would otherwise remain uncultivated mentally, rough in their friendships, without gentleness or

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

taste—it is very often their mistress who is their real master, and connexions of this sort the only school of morals in which they are initiated into a superior culture, and learn the value of disinterested relations. Even among the lower orders (who, when it comes to coarseness, so often remind us of the world of fashion) the woman, more sensitive, finer, more leisured, is driven by curiosity to adopt certain refinements, respects certain beauties of sentiment and of art which, though she may fail to understand them, she nevertheless places above what has seemed most desirable to the man, above money or position. Now whether the mistress be a young blood's (such as Saint-Loup) or a young workman's (electricians, for instance, must now be included in our truest order of Chivalry) her lover has too much admiration and respect for her not to extend them also to what she herself respects and admires; and for him the scale of values is thereby reversed. Her sex alone makes her weak; she suffers from nervous troubles, inexplicable things which in a man, or even in another woman—a woman whose nephew or cousin he was—would bring a smile to the lips of this stalwart young man. But he cannot bear to see her suffer whom he loves. The young nobleman who, like Saint-Loup, has a mistress acquires the habit, when he takes her out to dine, of carrying in his pocket the valerian "drops" which she may need, of ordering the waiter, firmly and with no hint of sarcasm, to see that he shuts the doors quietly and not to put any damp moss on the table, so as to spare his companion those discomforts which himself he has never felt, which compose for him an occult world in whose reality she has taught him to believe, discomforts for which he now feels

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

pity without in the least needing to understand them, for which he will still feel pity when other women than she shall be the sufferers. Saint-Loup's mistress—as the first monks of the middle ages taught Christendom—had taught him to be kind to animals, for which she had a passion, never moving without her dog, her canaries, her love-birds ; Saint-Loup looked after them with motherly devotion and treated as brutes the people who were not good to dumb creatures. On the other hand, an actress, or so-called actress, like this one who was living with him, —whether she were intelligent or not, and as to that I had no knowledge—by making him find the society of fashionable women boring, and look upon having to go out to a party as a painful duty, had saved him from snobbishness and cured him of frivolity. If, thanks to her, his social engagements filled a smaller place in the life of her young lover, at the same time, whereas if he had been simply a drawing-room man, vanity or self-interest would have dictated his choice of friends as rudeness would have characterised his treatment of them, his mistress had taught him to bring nobility and refinement into his friendship. With her feminine instinct, with a keener appreciation in men of certain qualities of sensibility which her lover might perhaps, without her guidance, have misunderstood and laughed at them, she had always been swift to distinguish from among the rest of Saint-Loup's friends, the one who had a real affection for him, and to make that one her favourite. She knew how to make him feel grateful to such a friend, shew his gratitude, notice what things gave his friend pleasure and what pain. And presently Saint-Loup, without any more need of her to prompt him, began to think of all

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

these things by himself, and at Balbec, where she was not with him, for me whom she had never seen, whom he had perhaps not yet so much as mentioned in his letters to her, of his own accord would pull up the window of a carriage in which I was sitting, take out of the room the flowers that made me feel unwell, and when he had to say good-bye to several people at once manage to do so before it was actually time for him to go, so as to be left alone and last with me, to make that distinction between them and me, to treat me differently from the rest. His mistress had opened his mind to the invisible, had brought a serious element into his life, delicacy into his heart, but all this escaped his sorrowing family who repeated : "That creature will be the death of him ; meanwhile she's doing what she can to disgrace him." It is true that he had succeeded in getting out of her all the good that she was capable of doing him ; and that she now caused him only incessant suffering, for she had taken an intense dislike to him and tormented him in every possible way. She had begun, one fine day, to look upon him as stupid and absurd because the friends that she had among the younger writers and actors had assured her that he was, and she duly repeated what they had said with that passion, that want of reserve which we shew whenever we receive from without and adopt as our own opinions or customs of which we previously knew nothing. She readily professed, like her actor friends, that between Saint-Loup and herself there was a great gulf fixed, and not to be crossed, because they were of different races, because she was an intellectual and he, whatever he might pretend, the born enemy of the intellect. This view of him seemed to her profound, and she sought confirmation

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of it in the most insignificant words, the most trivial actions of her lover. But when the same friends had further convinced her that she was destroying, in company so ill-suited to her, the great hopes which she had, they said, aroused in them, that her lover, would leave a mark on her, that by living with him she was spoiling her future as an artist ; to her contempt for Saint-Loup was added the same hatred that she would have felt for him if he had insisted upon inoculating her with a deadly germ. She saw him as seldom as possible, at the same time postponing the hour of a definite rupture, which seemed to me a highly improbable event. Saint-Loup made such sacrifices for her that unless she was ravishingly beautiful (but he had always refused to shew me her photograph, saying : " For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. These are only some snapshots that I took myself with my kodak ; they would give you a wrong idea of her.") it would surely be difficult for her to find another man who would consent to anything of the sort. I never reflected that a certain obsession to make a name for oneself, even when one has no talent, that the admiration, no more than the privately expressed admiration of people who are imposing on one, can (although it may not perhaps have been the case with Saint-Loup's mistress) be, even for a little prostitute, motives more determining than the pleasure of making money. Saint-Loup who, without quite understanding what was going on in the mind of his mistress, did not believe her to be completely sincere either in her unfair reproaches or in her promises of undying love, had all the same at certain moments the feeling that she would break with him whenever she could, and accordingly, impelled

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

no doubt by the instinct of self-preservation which was part of his love, a love more clear-sighted, possibly, than Saint-Loup himself, making use, too, of a practical capacity for business which was compatible in him with the loftiest and blindest flights of the heart, had refused to settle upon her¹ any capital, had borrowed an enormous sum so that she should want nothing, but made it over to her only from day to day. And no doubt, assuming that she really thought of leaving him, she was calmly waiting until she had feathered her nest, a process which, with the money given her by Saint-Loup, would not perhaps take very long, but would all the same require a time which must be conceded to prolong the happiness of my new friend—or his misery.

This dramatic period of their connexion, which had now reached its most acute stage, the most cruel for Saint-Loup, for she had forbidden him to remain in Paris, where his presence exasperated her, and had forced him to spend his leave at Balbec, within easy reach of his regiment—had begun one evening at the house of one of Saint-Loup's aunts, on whom he had prevailed to allow his friend to come there, before a large party, to recite some of the speeches from a symbolical play in which she had once appeared in an "advanced" theatre, and for which she had made him share the admiration that she herself professed.

But when she appeared in the room, with a large lily in her hand, and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilla Domini*, which she had persuaded Saint-Loup was an absolute "vision of beauty", her entrance had been greeted, in that assemblage of club men and duchesses, with smiles which the monotonous tone of her chantings,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

the oddity of certain words and their frequent recurrence had changed into fits of laughter, stifled at first but presently so uncontrollable that the wretched reciter had been unable to go on. Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room. A well-known duke made no bones about telling her that she had only herself to blame if she found herself criticised. "Damn it all, people really don't come to see 'turns' like that ! If the woman had talent, even ; but she has none and never will have any. 'Pon my soul, Paris is not such a fool as people make out. Society does not consist exclusively of imbeciles. This little lady evidently believed that she was going to take Paris by surprise. But Paris is not so easily surprised as all that, and there are still some things that they can't make us swallow."

As for the actress, she left the house with Saint-Loup, exclaiming :

"What do you mean by letting me in for those geese, those uneducated bitches, those dirty corner-boys ? I don't mind telling you, there wasn't a man in the room who didn't make eyes at me or squeeze my foot, and it was because I wouldn't look at them that they were out for revenge."

Words which had changed Robert's antipathy for people in society into a horror that was at once deep and distressing, and was provoked in him most of all by those who least deserved it, devoted kinsmen who, on behalf of the family, had sought to persuade Saint-Loup's lady to break with him, a move which she represented to him as inspired by their passion for her. Robert, although he had at once ceased to see them, used to imagine when he

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

was parted from his mistress as he was now, that they or others like them were profiting by his absence to return to the charge and had possibly prevailed over her. And when he spoke of the sensualists who were disloyal to their friends, who sought to seduce their friends' wives, tried to make them come to houses of assignation, his whole face would glow with suffering and hatred.

"I would kill them with less compunction than I would kill a dog, which is at least a well-behaved beast, and loyal and faithful. There are men who deserve the guillotine if you like, far more than poor wretches who have been led into crime by poverty and by the cruelty of the rich."

He spent the greater part of his time in sending letters and telegrams to his mistress. Every time that, while still preventing him from returning to Paris, she found an excuse to quarrel with him by post, I read the news at once in his evident discomposure. Inasmuch as his mistress never told him what fault she found with him, suspecting that possibly if she did not tell him it was because she did not know herself, and simply had had enough of him, he would still have liked an explanation and used to write to her: "Tell me what I have done wrong. I am quite ready to acknowledge my faults," the grief that overpowered him having the effect of persuading him that he had behaved badly.

But she kept him waiting indefinitely for her answers which, when they did come, were meaningless. And so it was almost always with a furrowed brow, and often with empty hands that I would see Saint-Loup returning from the post office, where, alone in all the hotel, he and Françoise went to fetch or to hand in letters, he from a

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

lover's impatience, she with a servant's mistrust of others. (His telegrams obliged him to take a much longer journey.)

When, some days after our dinner with the Blochs, my grandmother told me with a joyful air that Saint-Loup had just been asking her whether, before he left Balbec, she would not like him to take a photograph of her, and when I saw that she had put on her nicest dress on purpose, and was hesitating between several of her best hats, I felt a little annoyed by this childishness, which surprised me coming from her. I even went the length of asking myself whether I had not been mistaken in my grandmother, whether I did not esteem her too highly, whether she was as unconcerned as I had always supposed in the adornment of her person, whether she had not indeed the very weakness that I believed most alien to her temperament, namely coquetry.

Unfortunately, this displeasure that I derived from the prospect of a photographic "sitting", and more particularly from the satisfaction with which my grandmother appeared to be looking forward to it, I made so apparent that Françoise remarked it and did her best, unintentionally, to increase it by making me a sentimental, gushing speech, by which I refused to appear moved.

"Oh, Master ; my poor Madame will be so pleased at having her likeness taken, she is going to wear the hat that her old Françoise has trimmed for her, you must allow her, Master."

I acquired the conviction that I was not cruel in laughing at Françoise's sensibility, by reminding myself that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did the same. But my grandmother, noticing that I

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

seemed cross, said that if this plan of her sitting for her photograph offended me in any way she would give it up. I would not let her ; I assured her that I saw no harm in it, and left her to adorn herself, but, thinking that I shewed my penetration and strength of mind, I added a few stinging words of sarcasm, intended to neutralise the pleasure which she seemed to find in being photographed, so that if I was obliged to see my grandmother's magnificent hat, I succeeded at least in driving from her face that joyful expression which ought to have made me glad ; but alas, it too often happens, while the people we love best are still alive, that such expressions appear to us as the exasperating manifestation of some unworthy freak of fancy rather than as the precious form of the happiness which we should dearly like to procure for them. My ill-humour arose more particularly from the fact that, during the last week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me, and I had not been able to have her to myself for a moment, either by night or day. When I came back in the afternoon to be alone with her for a little I was told that she was not in the hotel ; or else she would shut herself up with Françoise for endless confabulations which I was not permitted to interrupt. And when, after being out all evening with Saint-Loup, I had been thinking on the way home of the moment at which I should be able to go to my grandmother and to kiss her, in vain might I wait for her to knock on the partition between us the three little taps which would tell me to go in and say good night to her ; I heard nothing ; at length I would go to bed, a little resentful of her for depriving me, with an indifference so new and strange in her, of a joy on

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

which I had so much counted, I would lie still for a while, my heart throbbing as in my childhood, listening to the wall which remained silent, until I cried myself to sleep.



*SEASCAPE,
WITH FRIEZE OF GIRLS*

THAT day, as for some days past, Saint-Loup had been obliged to go to Doncières, where, until his leave finally expired, he would be on duty now until late every afternoon. I was sorry that he was not at Balbec. I had seen alight from carriages and pass, some into the ball-room of the Casino, others into the ice-cream shop, young women who at a distance had seemed to me lovely. I was passing through one of those periods of our youth, unprovided with any one definite love, vacant, in which at all times and in all places—as a lover the woman by whose charms he is smitten—we desire, we seek, we see Beauty. Let but a single real feature—the little that one distinguishes of a woman seen from afar or from behind—enable us to project the form of beauty before our eyes, we imagine that we have seen her before, our heart beats, we hasten in pursuit, and will always remain half-persuaded that it was she, provided that the woman has vanished: it is only if we manage to overtake her that we realise our mistake.

Besides, as I grew more and more delicate, I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the difficulties that sprang up in the way of my attaining them. Charming women I seemed to see all round me, because I was too tired, if it was on the beach, too shy if it was in the Casino or at a pastry-cook's, to go anywhere near them. And yet if I was soon to die I should have liked first to know the appearance at close quarters, in reality of the prettiest girls that life had to offer, even although it should be another than myself or no one at all who was to take advantage of the offer. (I did not, in fact,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

appreciate the desire for possession that underlay my curiosity.) I should have had the courage to enter the ball-room if Saint-Loup had been with me. Left by myself, I was simply hanging about in front of the Grand Hotel until it was time for me to join my grandmother, when, still almost at the far end of the paved "front" along which they projected in a discordant spot of colour, I saw coming towards me five or six young girls, as different in appearance and manner from all the people whom one was accustomed to see at Balbec as could have been, landed there none knew whence, a flight of gulls which performed with measured steps upon the sands—the dawdlers using their wings to overtake the rest—a movement the purpose of which seems as obscure to the human bathers, whom they do not appear to see, as it is clearly determined in their own birdish minds.

One of these strangers was pushing as she came, with one hand, her bicycle ; two others carried golf-clubs ; and their attire generally was in contrast to that of the other girls at Balbec, some of whom, it was true, went in for games, but without adopting any special outfit.

It was the hour at which ladies and gentlemen came out every day for a turn on the "front", exposed to the merciless fire of the long glasses fastened upon them, as if they had each borne some disfigurement which she felt it her duty to inspect in its minutest details, by the chief magistrate's wife, proudly seated there with her back to the band-stand, in the middle of that dread line of chairs on which presently they too, actors turned critics, would come and establish themselves, to scrutinise in their turn those others who would then be filing past them. All these people who paced up and down the "front", tacking

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

as violently as if it had been the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their heads and eyes, settling their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), and who, pretending not to see so as to let it be thought that they were not interested, but covertly watching, for, fear of running against the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did, in fact, butt into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain ; their love—and consequently their fear—of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all men, whether they seek to please other people or to astonish them, or to shew them that they despise them. In the case of the solitary, his seclusion, even when it is absolute and ends only with life itself, has often as its primary cause a disordered love of the crowd, which so far overrules every other feeling that, not being able to win, when he goes out, the admiration of his hall-porter, of the passers-by, of the cabman whom he hails, he prefers not to be seen by them at all, and with that object abandons every activity that would oblige him to go out of doors.

Among all these people, some of whom were pursuing a train of thought, but if so betrayed its instability by spasmodic gestures, a roving gaze as little in keeping as the circumspect titubation of their neighbours, the girls whom I had noticed, with that mastery over their limbs which comes from perfect bodily condition and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, were advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

exactly the movements that they wished to perform, each of their members in full independence of all the rest, the greater part of their bodies preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in a good waltzer. They were now quite near me. Although each was a type absolutely different from the others, they all had beauty ; but to tell the truth I had seen them for so short a time, and without venturing to look them straight in the face, that I had not yet individualised any of them. Save one, whom her straight nose, her dark complexion pointed in contrast among the rest, like (in a renaissance picture of the Epiphany) a king of Arab cast, they were known to me only, one by a pair of eyes hard, set and mocking; another by cheeks in which the pink had that coppery tint which makes one think of geraniums ; and even of these points I had not yet indissolubly attached any one to one of these girls rather than to another ; and when (according to the order in which their series met the eye, marvellous because the most different aspects came next one another, because all scales of colours were combined in it, but confused as a piece of music in which I should not have been able to isolate and identify at the moment of their passage the successive phrases, no sooner distinguished than forgotten) I saw emerge a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, I knew not if these were the same that had already charmed me a moment ago, I could not bring them home to any one girl whom I might thereby have set apart from the rest and so identified. And this want, in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them sent flooding over the group a wave of harmony, the continuous transfusion of a beauty fluid, collective and mobile.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

It was not perhaps, in this life of ours, mere chance that had, in forming this group of friends, chosen them all of such beauty ; perhaps these girls (whose attitude was enough to reveal their nature, bold, frivolous and hard), extremely sensitive to everything that was ludicrous or ugly, incapable of yielding to an intellectual or moral attraction, had naturally felt themselves, among companions of their own age, repelled by all those in whom a pensive or sensitive disposition was betrayed by shyness, awkwardness, constraint, by what, they would say, "didn't appeal" to them, and from such had held aloof ; while they attached themselves, on the other hand, to others to whom they were drawn by a certain blend of grace, suppleness, and physical neatness, the only form in which they were able to picture the frankness of a seductive character and the promise of pleasant hours in one another's company. Perhaps, too, the class to which they belonged, a class which I should not have found it easy to define, was at that point in its evolution at which, whether thanks to its growing wealth and leisure, or thanks to new athletic habits, extended now even to certain plebeian elements, and a habit of physical culture to which had not yet been added the culture of the mind, a social atmosphere, comparable to that of smooth and prolific schools of sculpture, which have not yet gone in for tortured expressions, produces naturally and in abundance fine bodies with fine legs, fine hips, wholesome and reposeful faces, with an air of agility and guile. And were they not noble and calm models of human beauty that I beheld there, outlined against the sea, like statues exposed to the sunlight upon a Grecian shore ?

Just as if, in the heart of their band, which progressed

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

along the "front" like a luminous comet, they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of creatures of another race whose sufferings even could not awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them, forced those who had stopped to talk to step aside, as though from the path of a machine that had been set going by itself, so that it was no good waiting for it to get out of their way, their utmost sign of consciousness being when, if some old gentleman of whom they did not admit the existence and thrust from them the contact, had fled with a frightened or furious, but a headlong or ludicrous motion, they looked at one another and smiled. They had, for whatever did not form part of their group, no affectation of contempt ; their genuine contempt was sufficient. But they could not set eyes on an obstacle without amusing themselves by crossing it, either in a running jump or with both feet together, because they were all filled to the brim, exuberant with that youth which we need so urgently to spend that even when we are unhappy or unwell, obedient rather to the necessities of our age than to the mood of the day, we can never pass anything that can be jumped over or slid down without indulging ourselves conscientiously, interrupting, interspersing our slow progress—as Chopin his most melancholy phrase—with graceful deviations in which caprice is blended with virtuosity. The wife of an elderly banker, after hesitating between various possible exposures for her husband, had settled him on a folding chair, facing the "front", sheltered from wind and sun by the bandstand. Having seen him comfortably installed there, she had gone to buy a newspaper which she would read aloud to him, to distract him, one of her little absences which

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

she never prolonged for more than five minutes, which seemed long enough to him but which she repeated at frequent intervals so that this old husband on whom she lavished an attention that she took care to conceal, should have the impression that he was still quite, alive and like other people and was in no need of protection. The platform of the band-stand provided, above his head, a natural and tempting springboard, across which, without a moment's hesitation, the eldest of the little band began to run ; she jumped over the terrified old man, whose yachting cap was brushed by the nimble feet, to the great delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a "dashing" face, which expressed, for that bold act, an admiration and a merriment in which I seemed to discern a trace of timidity, a shamefaced and blustering timidity which did not exist in the others. "Oh, the poor old man ; he makes me sick ; he looks half dead ;" said a girl with a croaking voice, but with more sarcasm than sympathy. They walked on a little way, then stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, with no thought whether they were impeding the passage of other people, and held a council, a solid body of irregular shape, compact, unusual and shrill, like birds that gather on the ground at the moment of flight ; then they resumed their leisurely stroll along the "front", against a background of sea.

By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and impersonal. I had dealt them like cards into so many heaps to compose (failing their names, of which I was still ignorant) the big one who had jumped over the old banker ; the little one who stood out against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

cheeks, her green eyes ; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion, in such contrast to all the rest, another, with a white face like an egg on which a tiny nose described an arc of a circle like a chicken's beak ; yet another, wearing a hooded cape (which gave her so poverty-stricken an appearance, and so contradicted the smartness of the figure beneath that the explanation which suggested itself was that this girl must have parents of high position who valued their self-esteem so far above the visitors to Balbec and the sartorial elegance of their own children that it was a matter of the utmost indifference to them that their daughter should stroll on the "front" dressed in a way which humbler people would have considered too modest) ; a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, colourless cheeks, a black polo-cap pulled down over her face, who was pushing a bicycle with so exaggerated a movement of her hips, with an air borne out by her language, which was so typically of the gutter and was being shouted so loud, when I passed her (although among her expressions I caught that irritating "live my own life") that, abandoning the hypothesis which her friend's hooded cape had made me construct, I concluded instead that all these girls belonged to the population which frequents the racing-tracks, and must be the very juvenile mistresses of professional bicyclists. In any event, in none of my suppositions was there any possibility of their being virtuous. At first sight—in the way in which they looked at one another and smiled, in the insistent stare of the one with the dull cheeks—I had grasped that they were not. Besides, my grandmother had always watched over me with a delicacy too timorous for me not to believe that the sum total of the things

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

one ought not to do was indivisible or that girls who were lacking in respect for their elders would suddenly be stopped short by scruples when there were pleasures at stake more tempting than that of jumping over an octogenarian.

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the mutual response which they gave one another with eyes animated my self-sufficiency and the spirit of comradeship, in which were kindled at every moment now the interest now the insolent indifference with which each of them sparkled according as her glance fell on one of her friends or on passing strangers, that consciousness, moreover, of knowing one another intimately enough always to go about together, by making them a 'band apart' established between their independent and separate bodies, as slowly they advanced, a bond invisible but harmonious, like a single warm shadow, a single atmosphere making of them a whole as homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound.

For an instant, as I passed the dark one with the fat cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle, I caught her smiling, sidelong glance, aimed from the centre of that inhuman world which enclosed the life of this little tribe, an inaccessible, unknown world to which the idea of what I was could certainly never attain nor find a place in it. Wholly occupied with what her companions were saying, this young girl in her polo-cap, pulled down very low over her brow, had she seen me at the moment in which the dark ray emanating from her eyes had fallen on me? In the heart of what universe did she distinguish me? It would have been as hard for me to

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

say as, when certain peculiarities are made visible, thanks to the telescope, in a neighbouring planet, it is difficult to arrive at the conclusion that human beings inhabit it, that they can see us, or to say what ideas the sight of us can have aroused in their minds.

If we thought that the eyes of a girl like that were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we feel that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition ; that it is, unknown to us, the dark shadows of the ideas that the creature is conceiving, relative to the people and places that she knows—the turf of racecourses, the sand of cycling tracks over which, pedalling on past fields and woods, she would have drawn me after her, that little peri, more seductive to me than she of the Persian paradise—the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the plans that she is forming or that others have formed for her ; and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will. I knew that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what there was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire ; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be realised, but exhilarating, because what had hitherto been my life, having ceased of a sudden to be my whole life, being no more now than a little part of the space stretching out before me, which I was burning to cover and which was composed of the lives of these girls, offered me that prolongation, that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness. And no doubt the fact that we had, these girls and I, not one

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

habit—as we had not one idea—in common, was to make it more difficult for me to make friends with them and to please them. But perhaps, also, it was thanks to those differences, to my consciousness that there did not enter into the composition of the nature and actions of these girls a single element that I knew or possessed, that there came in place of my satiety a thirst—like that with which a dry land burns—for a life which my soul, because it had never until now received one drop of it, would absorb all the more greedily in long draughts, with a more perfect imbibition.

I had looked so closely at the dark cyclist with the bright eyes that she seemed to notice my attention, and said to the biggest of the girls something that I could not hear. To be honest, this dark one was not the one that pleased me most, simply because she was dark and because (since the day on which, from the little path by Tansonville, I had seen Gilberte) a girl with reddish hair and a golden skin had remained for me the inaccessible ideal. But Gilberte herself, had I not loved her principally because she had appeared to me haloed with that aureole of being the friend of Bergotte, of going with him to look at old cathedrals? And in the same way could I not rejoice at having seen this dark girl look at me (which made me hope that it would be easier for me to get to know her first), for she would introduce me to the others, to the pitiless one who had jumped over the old man's head, to the cruel one who had said "He makes me sick, poor old man!" to all of them in turn, among whom, moreover, she had the distinction of being their inseparable companion? And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of these girls, that

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

their eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me now and again, playing upon me unawares, like the play of sunlight upon a wall, might ever, by a miraculous alchemy, allow to interpenetrate among their ineffable particles the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, that I myself might some day take my place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge—that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some classical frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the godlike hierophants.

The happiness of knowing these girls was, then, not to be realised. Certainly it would not have been the first of its kind that I had renounced. I had only to recall the numberless strangers whom, even at Balbec, the carriage bowling away from them at full speed had forced me for ever to abandon. And indeed the pleasure that was given me by the little band, as noble as if it had been composed of Hellenic virgins, came from some suggestion that there was in it of the flight of passing figures along a road. This fleetingness of persons who are not known to us, who force us to put out from the harbour of life, in which the women whose society we frequent have all, in course of time, laid bare their blemishes, urges us into that state of pursuit in which there is no longer anything to arrest the imagination. But to strip our pleasures of imagination is to reduce them to their own dimensions, that is to say to nothing. Offered me by one of those procuresses (whose good offices, all the same, the reader has seen that I by no means scorned), withdrawn from the element which gave them so many fine

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

shades and such vagueness, these girls would have enchanted me less. We must have imagination, awakened by the uncertainty of being able to attain our object, to create a goal which hides our other goal from us, and by substituting for sensual pleasures the ideal of penetrating into a life prevents us from recognising that pleasure, from tasting its true savour, from restricting it to its own range.

There must be, between us and the fish which, if we saw it for the first time cooked and served on a table, would not appear worth the endless trouble, craft and stratagem that are necessary if we are to catch it, interposed, during our afternoons with the rod, the ripple to whose surface come wavering, without our quite knowing what we intend to do with them, the burnished gleam of flesh, the indefiniteness of a form, in the fluidity of a transparent and flowing azure.

These girls benefited also by that alteration of social values characteristic of seaside life. All the advantages which, in our ordinary environment, extend and magnify our importance, we there find to have become invisible, in fact to be eliminated ; while on the other hand the people whom we suppose, without reason, to enjoy similar advantages appear to us amplified to artificial dimensions. This made it easy for strange women generally, and to-day for these girls in particular, to acquire an enormous importance in my eyes, and impossible to make them aware of such importance as I might myself possess.

But if there was this to be said for the excursion of the little band, that it was but an excerpt from the innumerable flight of passing women, which had always

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

disturbed me, their flight was here reduced to a movement so slow as to approach immobility. Now, precisely because, in a phase so far from rapid, faces, no longer swept past me in a whirlwind, but calm and distinct, still appeared beautiful, I was prevented from thinking as I had so often thought when Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage bore me away that, at closer quarters, if I had stopped for a moment, certain details, a pitted skin, drooping nostrils, a silly gape, a grimace of a smile, an ugly figure might have been substituted, in the face and body of the woman, for those that I had doubtless imagined; for there had sufficed a pretty outline, a glimpse of a fresh complexion, for me to add, in entire good faith, a fascinating shoulder, a delicious glance of which I carried in my mind for ever a memory or a preconceived idea, these rapid decipherings of a person whom we see in motion exposing us thus to the same errors as those too rapid readings in which, on a single syllable and without waiting to identify the rest, we base instead of the word that is in the text a wholly different word with which our memory supplies us. It could not be so with me now. I had looked well at them all; each of them I had seen, not from every angle and rarely in full face, but all the same in two or three aspects different enough to enable me to make either the correction or the verification, to take a "proof" of the different possibilities of line and colour that are hazarded at first sight, and to see persist in them, through a series of expressions, something unalterably material. I could say to myself with conviction that neither in Paris nor at Balbec, in the most favourable hypotheses of what might have happened, even if I had been able to stop and

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

talk to them, the passing women who had caught my eye, had there ever been one whose appearance, followed by her disappearance without my having managed to know her, had left me with more regret than would these, had given me the idea that her friendship might be a thing so intoxicating. Never, among actresses nor among peasants nor among girls from a convent school had I beheld anything so beautiful, impregnated with so much that was unknown, so inestimably precious, so apparently inaccessible. They were, of the unknown and potential happiness of life, an illustration so delicious and in so perfect a state that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I was desperate with the fear that I might not be able to make, in unique conditions which left no room for any possibility of error, proper trial of what is the most mysterious thing that is offered to us by the beauty which we desire and console ourselves for never possessing, by demanding pleasure—as Swann had always refused to do before Odette's day—from women whom we have not desired, so that, indeed, we die without having ever known what that other pleasure was. No doubt it was possible that it was not in reality an unknown pleasure, that on a close inspection its mystery would dissipate and vanish, that it was no more than a projection, a mirage of desire. But in that case I could blame only the compulsion of a law of nature,—which if it applied to these girls would apply to all—and not the imperfection of the object. For it was that which I should have chosen above all others, *feeling* quite certain, with a botanist's satisfaction, that it was not possible to find collected anywhere rarer specimens than these young flowers who were interrupting at this moment be-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

fore my eyes the line of the sea with their slender hedge, like a bower of Pennsylvania roses adorning a garden on the brink of a cliff, between which is contained the whole tract of ocean crossed by some steamer, so slow in gliding along the blue and horizontal line that stretches from one stem to the next that an idle butterfly, dawdling in the cup of a flower which the moving hull has long since passed, can, if it is to fly and be sure of arriving before the vessel, wait until nothing but the tiniest slice of blue still separates the questing prow from the first petal of the flower towards which it is steering.

I went indoors because I was to dine at Rivebelle with Robert, and my grandmother insisted that on those evenings, before going out, I must lie down for an hour on my bed, a rest which the Balbec doctor presently ordered me to extend to the other evenings also.

However, there was no need, when one went indoors, to leave the "front" and to enter the hotel by the hall, that is to say from behind. By virtue of an alteration of the clock which reminded me of those Saturdays when, at Combray, we used to have luncheon an hour earlier, now with summer at the full the days had become so long that the sun was still high in the heavens, as though it were only tea-time, when the tables were being laid for dinner in the Grand Hotel. And so the great sliding windows were kept open from the ground. I had but to step across a low wooden sill to find myself in the dining-room, through which I walked and straight across to the lift.

As I passed the office I addressed a smile to the manager, and with no shudder of disgust gathered one for myself from his face which, since I had been at Balbec,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

my comprehensive study of it was injecting and transforming, little by little, like a natural history preparation. His features had become familiar to me, charged with a meaning that was of no importance but still intelligible, like a script which one can read, and had ceased in any way to resemble these queer, intolerable characters which his face had presented to me on that first day, when I had seen before me a personage now forgotten, or, if I succeeded in recalling him, unrecognisable, difficult to identify with this insignificant and polite personality of which the other was but a caricature, a hideous and rapid sketch. Without either the shyness or the sadness of the evening of my arrival I rang for the attendant, who no longer stood in silence while I rose by his side in the lift as in a mobile thoracic cage propelled upwards along its ascending pillar, but repeated :

“There aren’t the people now there were a month back. They’re beginning to go now ; the days are drawing in.” He said this not because there was any truth in it but because, having an engagement, presently, for a warmer part of the coast, he would have liked us all to leave, so that the hotel could be shut up and he have a few days to himself before “rejoining” in his new place. “Rejoin” and “new” were not, by the way, incompatible terms, since, for the lift-boy, “rejoin” was the usual form of the verb “to join”. The only thing that surprised me was that he condescended to say “place”, for he belonged to that modern proletariat which seeks to efface from our language every trace of the rule of domesticity. A moment later, however, he informed me that in the “situation” which he was about to “rejoin”, he would have a smarter “tunic” and a better “salary”,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the words "livery" and "wages" sounding to him obsolete and unseemly. And as, by an absurd contradiction, the vocabulary has, through thick and thin, among us "masters", survived the conception of inequality, I was always failing to understand what the lift-boy said. For instance, the only thing that interested me was to know whether my grandmother was in the hotel. Now, forestalling my questions, the lift-boy would say to me : "That lady has just gone out from your rooms." I was invariably taken in ; I supposed that he meant my grandmother. "No, that lady ; I think she's an employee of yours." As in the old speech of the middle classes, which ought really to be done away with, a cook is not called an employee, I thought for a moment : "But he must be mistaken. We don't own a factory ; we haven't any employees." Suddenly I remembered that the title of "employee" is, like the wearing of a moustache among waiters, a sop to their self-esteem given to servants, and realised that this lady who had just gone out must be Françoise (probably on a visit to the coffee-maker, or to watch the Belgian lady's little maid at her sewing), though even this sop did not satisfy the lift-boy, for he would say quite naturally, speaking pityingly of his own class, "with the working man" or "the small person", using the same singular form as Racine when he speaks of "the poor". But as a rule, for my zeal and timidity of the first evening were now things of the past, I no longer spoke to the lift-boy. It was he now who stood there and received no answer during the short journey on which he threaded his way through the hotel, hollowed out inside like a toy, which extended round about us, floor by floor, the ramifications of its corridors in the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

depths of which the light grew velvety, lost its tone, diminished the communicating doors, the steps of the service stairs which it transformed into that amber haze, unsubstantial and mysterious as a twilight, in which Rembrandt picks out here and there a window-sill or a well-head. And on each landing a golden light reflected from the carpet indicated the setting sun and the lavatory window.

I asked myself whether the girls I had just seen lived at Balbec, and who they could be. When our desire is thus concentrated upon a little tribe of humanity which it singles out from the rest, everything that can be associated with that tribe becomes a spring of emotion and then of reflexion. I had heard a lady say on the "front": "She is a friend of the little Simonet girl" with that self-important air of inside knowledge, as who should say: "He is the inseparable companion of young La Rochefoucauld." And immediately she had detected on the face of the person to whom she gave this information a curiosity to see more of the favoured person who was "a friend of the little Simonet". A privilege, obviously, that did not appear to be granted to all the world. For aristocracy is a relative state. And there are plenty of inexpensive little holes and corners where the son of an upholsterer is the arbiter of fashion and reigns over a court like any young Prince of Wales. I have often since then sought to recall how it first sounded for me there on the beach, that name of Simonet, still quite indefinite as to its form, which I had failed to distinguish, and also as to its significance, to the designation by it of such and such a person, or perhaps of some one else; imprinted, in fact, with that vagueness, that novelty which we find so

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

moving in the sequel, when the name whose letters are every moment engraved more deeply on our hearts by our incessant thought of them has become (though this was not to happen to me with the name of the "little Simonet" until several years had passed) the first coherent sound that comes to our lips, whether on waking from sleep or on recovering from a swoon, even before the idea of what o'clock it is or of where we are, almost before the word "I", as though the person whom it names were more "we" even than we ourself, and as though after a brief spell of unconsciousness the phase that is the first of all to dissolve is that in which we were not thinking of her. I do not know why I said to myself from the first that the name Simonet must be that of one of the band of girls; from that moment I never ceased to ask myself how I could get to know the Simonet family, get to know them, moreover, through people whom they considered superior to themselves (which ought not to be difficult if the girls were only common little "bounders") so that they might not form a disdainful idea of me. For one cannot have a perfect knowledge, one cannot effect the complete absorption of a person who disdains one, so long as one has not overcome her disdain. And since, whenever the idea of women who are so different from us penetrates our senses, unless we are able to forget it or the competition of other ideas eliminates it, we know no rest until we have converted those aliens into something that is compatible with ourself, our heart being in this respect endowed with the same kind of reaction and activity as our physical organism, which cannot abide the infusion of any foreign body into its veins without at once striving to

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

digest and assimilate it: the little Simonet must be the prettiest of them all—she who, I felt moreover, might yet become my mistress, for she was the only one who, two or three times half-turning her head, had appeared to take cognisance of my fixed stare. I asked the lift-boy whether he knew of any people at Balbec called Simonet. Not liking to admit that there was anything which he did not know, he replied that he seemed to have heard the name somewhere. As we reached the highest landing I told him to have the latest lists of visitors sent up to me.

I stepped out of the lift, but instead of going to my room I made my way farther along the corridor, for before my arrival the valet in charge of the landing, despite his horror of draughts, had opened the window at the end, which instead of looking out to the sea faced the hill and valley inland, but never allowed them to be seen, for its panes, which were made of clouded glass, were generally closed. I made a short "station" in front of it, time enough just to pay my devotions to the view which for once it revealed over the hill against which the back of the hotel rested, a view that contained but a solitary house, planted in the middle distance, though the perspective and the evening light in which I saw it, while preserving its mass, gave it a sculptural beauty and a velvet background, as though to one of those architectural works in miniature, tiny temples or chapels wrought in gold and enamels, which serve as reliquaries and are exposed only on rare and solemn days for the veneration of the faithful. But this moment of adoration had already lasted too long, for the valet, who carried in one hand a bunch of keys

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

and with the other saluted me by touching his verger's skull-cap, though without raising it, on account of the pure, cool evening air, came and drew together, like those of a shrine, the two sides of the window, and so shut off the minuté edifice, the glistening relic from my adoring gaze. I went into my room. Regularly, as the season advanced, the picture that I found there in my window changed. At first it was, broad daylight, and dark only if the weather was bad : and then, in the greenish glass which it distended with the curve of its round waves, the sea, set among the iron uprights of my window like a piece of stained glass in its leads, ravelled out over all the deep rocky border of the bay little plumed triangles of an unmoving spray delineated with the delicacy of a feather or a downy breast from Pisanello's pencil, and fixed in that white, unalterable, creamy enamel which is used to depict fallen snow in Gallé's glass.

Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered my room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, travelling, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) leaning over the sea from the hinge of the horizon as a sacred picture leans over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany book-cases that ran along the walls, which I carried back in my mind to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, seemed like those different scenes which some old master executed long ago for a confraternity upon a shrine, whose separate panels are now exhibited side by side upon the wall of a museum gallery, so that the visitor's imagination alone can restore them to their

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

place on the predella of the reredos. A few weeks later, when I went upstairs, the sun had already set. Like the one that I used to see at Combray, behind the Calvary, when I was coming home from a walk and looking forward to going down to the kitchen before dinner, a band of red sky over the sea, compact and clear-cut as a layer of aspic over meat, then, a little later, over a sea already cold and blue like a grey mullet, a sky of the same pink as the salmon that we should presently be ordering at Rivebelle reawakened the pleasure which I was to derive from the act of dressing to go out to dinner. Over the sea, quite near the shore, were trying to rise, one beyond another, at wider and wider intervals, vapours of a pitchy blackness but also of the polish and consistency of agate, of a visible weight, so much so that the highest among them, poised at the end of their contorted stem and overreaching the centre of gravity of the pile that had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half the height of the sky, and of precipitating it into the sea. The sight of a ship that was moving away like a nocturnal traveller gave me the same impression that I had had in the train of being set free from the necessity of sleep and from confinement in a bedroom. Not that I felt myself a prisoner in the room in which I now was, since in another hour I should have left it and be getting into the carriage. I threw myself down on the bed ; and, just as if I had been lying in a berth on board one of those steamers which I could see quite near to me and which, when night came, it would be strange to see stealing slowly out into the darkness, like shadowy and silent but unsleeping swans, I was on all sides surrounded by pictures of the sea.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

But as often as not they were, indeed, only pictures ; I forgot that below their coloured expanse was hollowed the sad desolation of the beach, travelled by the restless evening breeze whose breath I had so anxiously felt on my arrival at Balbec ; besides, even in my room, being wholly taken up with thoughts of the girls whom I had seen go past, I was no longer in a state of mind calm or disinterested enough to allow the formation of any really deep impression of beauty. The anticipation of dinner at Rivebelle made my mood more frivolous still, and my mind, dwelling at such moments upon the surface of the body which I was going to dress up so as to try to appear as pleasing as possible in the feminine eyes which would be scrutinising me in the brilliantly lighted restaurant, was incapable of putting any depth behind the colour of things. And if, beneath my window, the unwearying, gentle flight of sea-martins and swallows had not arisen like a playing fountain, like living fireworks, joining the intervals between their soaring rockets with the motionless white streaming lines of long horizontal wakes of foam, without the charming miracle of this natural and local phenomenon, which brought into touch with reality the scenes that I had before my eyes, I might easily have believed that they were no more than a selection, made afresh every day, of paintings which were shewn quite arbitrarily in the place in which I happened to be and without having any necessary connexion with that place : At one time it was an exhibition of Japanese colour-prints : beside the neat disc of sun, red and round as the moon, a yellow cloud seemed a lake against which black swords were outlined like the trees upon its shore ; a bar of a tender pink which I had never seen again

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

after my first paint-box swelled out into a river on either bank of which boats seemed to be waiting high and dry for some one to push them down and set them afloat. And with the contemptuous, bored, frivolous glance of an amateur or a woman hurrying through a picture gallery between two social engagements, I would say to myself : "Curious sunset, this ; it's different from what they usually are but, after all I've seen them just as fine, just as remarkable as this." I had more pleasure on evenings when a ship, absorbed and liquefied by the horizon so much the same in colour as herself (an Impressionist exhibition this time) that it seemed to be also of the same matter, appeared as if some one had simply cut out with a pair of scissors her bows and the rigging in which she tapered into a slender filigree from the vaporous blue of the sky. Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, when it was enlarged and prolonged by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it all to be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of light and shade. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was so filled with innumerable clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed to be intended, for some special purpose or to illustrate a special talent of the artist, to present a "Cloud Study", while the fronts of the various bookcases shewing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition—of which certain of our contemporaries are so fond—of one and the same effect always observed at different hours but able now in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the immobility of art to be seen all together in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a rosy touch would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be attaching with its wings at the corner of this "Harmony in Grey and Pink" in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. The pink vanished ; there was nothing now left to look at. I rose for a moment and before lying down again drew close the inner curtains. Above them I could see from my bed the ray of light that still remained, growing steadily fainter and thinner, but it was without any feeling of sadness, without any regret for its passing that I thus allowed to die above the curtains the hour at which, as a rule, I was seated at table, for I knew that this day was of another kind than ordinary days, longer, like those arctic days which night interrupts for a few minutes only ; I knew that from the chrysalis of the dusk was preparing to emerge, by a radiant metamorphosis, the dazzling light of the Rivebelle restaurant. I said to myself : " It is time " ; I stretched myself on the bed, and rose, and finished dressing ; and I found a charm in these idle moments, lightened of every material burden, in which while down below the others were dining I was employing the forces accumulated during the inactivity of this last hour of the day only in drying my washed body, in putting on a dinner jacket, in tying my tie, in making all those gestures which were already dictated by the anticipated pleasure of seeing again some woman whom I had noticed, last time, at Rivebelle, who had seemed to be watching me, had perhaps left the table

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

for a moment only in the hope that I would follow her ; it was with joy that I enriched myself with all these attractions so as to give myself, whole, alert, willing, to a new life, free, without cares, in which I would lean my hesitations upon the calm strength of Saint-Loup, and would choose from among the different species of animated nature and the produce of every land those which, composing the unfamiliar dishes that my companion would at once order, might have tempted my appetite or my imagination. And then at the end of the season came the days when I could no longer pass indoors from the "front" through the dining-room ; its windows stood open no more, for it was night now outside and the swarm of poor folk and curious idlers, attracted by the blaze of light which they might not reach, hung in black clusters chilled by the north wind to the luminous sliding walls of that buzzing hive of glass.

There was a knock at my door ; it was Aimé who had come upstairs in person with the latest lists of visitors.

Aimé could not go away without telling me that Dreyfus was guilty a thousand times over. "It will all come out," he assured me, "not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who's very thick with the General Staff, told me. I asked him if they wouldn't decide to bring it all to light at once, before the year is out. He laid down his cigarette," Aimé went on, acting the scene for my benefit, and shaking his head and his forefinger as his informant had done, as much as to say : "We mustn't expect too much !"—"Not this year, Aimé," those were his very words, putting his hand on my shoulder, "It isn't possible. But next Easter, yes !" And Aimé tapped me gently on my shoulder, saying, "You see, I'm

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

letting you have it exactly as he told me," whether because he was flattered at this act of familiarity by a distinguished person or so that I might better appreciate, with a full knowledge of the facts, the worth of the arguments and our grounds for hope.

It was not without a slight throb of the heart that on the first page of the list I caught sight of the words "Simonet and family." I had in me a store of old dream-memories which dated from my childhood, and in which all the tenderness (tenderness that existed in my heart, but, when my heart felt it, was not distinguishable from anything else) was wafted to me by a person as different as possible from myself. This person, once again I fashioned her, utilising for the purpose the name Simonet and the memory of the harmony that had reigned between the young bodies which I had seen displaying themselves on the beach, in a sportive procession worthy of Greek art or of Giotto. I knew not which of these girls was Mlle. Simonet, if indeed any of them were so named, but I did know that I was loved by Mlle. Simonet and that I was going, with Saint-Loup's help, to attempt to know her. Unfortunately, having on that condition only obtained an extension of his leave, he was obliged to report for duty every day at Doncières : but to make him forsake his military duty I had felt that I might count, more even than on his friendship for myself, on that same curiosity, as a human naturalist, which I myself had so often felt—even without having seen the person mentioned, and simply on hearing some one say that there was a pretty cashier at a fruiterer's—to acquaint myself with a new variety of feminine beauty. But that curiosity I had been wrong in hoping to excite

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would long remain paralysed in him by his love for that actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring him, he would have repressed it, from an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress. And so it was without any promise from him that he would take an active interest in my girls that we started out to dine at Rivebelle.

At first, when we arrived there, the sun used just to have set, but it was light still ; in the garden outside the restaurant, where the lamps had not yet been lighted, the heat of the day fell and settled, as though in a vase along the sides of which the transparent, dusky jelly of the air seemed of such consistency that a tall rose-tree fastened against the dim wall which it streaked with pink veins, looked like the arborescence that one sees at the heart of an onyx. Presently night had always fallen when we left the carriage, often indeed before we started from Balbec if the evening was wet and we had put off sending for the carriage in the hope of the weather's improving. But on those days it was without any sadness that I listened to the wind howling, I knew that it did not mean the abandonment of my plans, imprisonment in my bedroom ; I knew that in the great dining-room of the restaurant, which we would enter to the sound of the music of the gipsy band, the innumerable lamps would triumph easily over darkness and chill, by applying to them their broad cauteries of molten gold, and I jumped light-heartedly after Saint-Loup into the closed carriage which stood waiting for us in the rain. For some time past the words of Bergotte, when he pronounced

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

himself positive that, in spite of all I might say, I had been created to enjoy, pre-eminently, the pleasures of the mind, had restored to me, with regard to what I might succeed in achieving later on, a hope that was disappointed afresh every day by the boredom that I felt on setting myself down before a writing-table to start work on a critical essay or a novel. "After all," I said to myself, "possibly the pleasure that its author has found in writing it is not the infallible test of the literary value of a page ; it may be only an accessory, one that is often to be found superadded to that value, but the want of which can have no prejudicial effect on it. Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written yawning." My grandmother set my doubts at rest by telling me that I should be able to work and should enjoy working as soon as my health improved. And, our doctor having thought it only prudent to warn me of the grave risks to which my state of health might expose me, and having outlined all the hygienic precaution that I ought to take to avoid any accident—I subordinated all my pleasures to an object which I judged to be infinitely more important than them, that of becoming strong enough to be able to bring into being the work which I had, possibly, within me ; I had been exercising over myself, ever since I had come to Balbec, a scrupulous and constant control. Nothing would have induced me, there, to touch the cup of coffee which would have robbed me of the night's sleep that was necessary if I was not to be tired next day. But as soon as we reached Rivebelle, immediately, what with the excitement of a new pleasure, and finding myself in that different zone into which the exception to our rule of life takes us after it has cut the thread, patiently spun

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

throughout so many days, that was guiding us towards wisdom—as though there were never to be any such thing as to-morrow, nor any lofty aims to be realised, vanished all that exact machinery of prudent hygienic measures which had been working to safeguard them. A waiter was offering to take my coat, whereupon Saint-Loup asked: “You’re sure you won’t be cold? Perhaps you’d better keep it: it’s not very warm in here.”

“No, no,” I assured him; and perhaps I did not feel the cold; but however that might be, I no longer knew the fear of falling ill, the necessity of not dying, the importance of work. I gave up my coat; we entered the dining-room to the sound of some warlike march played by the gipsies, we advanced between two rows of tables laid for dinner as along an easy path of glory, and, feeling a happy glow imparted to our bodies by the rhythms of the orchestra which rendered us its military honours, gave us this unmerited triumph, we concealed it beneath a grave and frozen mien, beneath a languid, casual gait, so as not to be like those music-hall “mashers” who, having wedded a ribald verse to a patriotic air, come running on to the stage with the martial countenance of a victorious general.

From that moment I was a new man, who was no longer my grandmother’s grandson and would remember her only when it was time to get up and go, but the brother, for the time being, of the waiters who were going to bring us our dinner.

The dose of beer—all the more, that of champagne—which at Balbec I should not have ventured to take in a week, albeit to my calm and lucid consciousness the flavour of those beverages represented a pleasure clearly

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

appreciable, since it was also one that could easily be sacrificed, I now imbibed at a sitting, adding to it a few drops of port wine, too much distracted to be able to taste it, and I gave the violinist who had just been playing the two louis which I had been saving up for the last month with a view to buying something, I could not remember what. Several of the waiters, set going among the tables, were flying along at full speed, each carrying on his outstretched palms a dish which it seemed to be the object of this kind of race not to let fall. And in fact the chocolate *soufflés* arrived at their destination unspilled, the potatoes *à l'anglaise*, in spite of the pace which ought to have sent them flying, came arranged as at the start round the Pauilhac lamb. I noticed one of these servants, very tall, plumed with superb black locks, his face dyed in a tint that suggested rather certain species of rare birds than a human being, who, running without pause (and, one would have said, without purpose) from one end of the room to the other, made me think of one of those macaws which fill the big aviaries in zoological gardens with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Presently the spectacle assumed an order, in my eyes at least, growing at once more noble and more calm. All this dizzy activity became fixed in a quiet harmony. I looked at the round tables whose innumerable assemblage filled the restaurant like so many planets, as planets are represented in old allegorical pictures. Moreover, there seemed to be some irresistibly attractive force at work among these divers stars, and at each table the diners had eyes only for the tables at which they were not sitting, except perhaps some wealthy amphitryon who, having managed to secure a famous author, was en-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

deavouring to extract from him, thanks to the magic properties of the turning table, a few unimportant remarks at which the ladies marvelled. The harmony of these astral tables did not prevent the incessant revolution of the countless servants who, because instead of being seated like the diners they were on their feet, performed their evolutions in a more exalted sphere. No doubt they were running, one to fetch the *hors d'œuvre*, another to change the wine or with clean glasses. But despite these special reasons, their perpetual course among the round tables yielded, after a time, to the observer the law of its dizzy but ordered circulation. Seated behind a bank of flowers, two horrible cashiers, busy with endless calculations, seemed two witches occupied in forecasting by astrological signs the disasters that might from time to time occur in this celestial vault fashioned according to the scientific conceptions of the middle ages.

And I rather pitied all the diners because I felt that for them the round tables were not planets and that they had not cut through the scheme of things one of those sections which deliver us from the bondage of appearances and enable us to perceive analogies. They thought that they were dining with this or that person, that the dinner would cost roughly so much, and that to-morrow they would begin all over again. And they appeared absolutely unmoved by the progress through their midst of a train of young assistants who, having probably at that moment no urgent duty, advanced processionally bearing rolls of bread in baskets. Some of them, the youngest, stunned by the cuffs which the head waiters administered to them as they passed, fixed melancholy eyes upon a distant dream and were consoled only if some visitor

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

from the Balbec hotel in which they had once been employed, recognising them, said a few words to them, telling them in person to take away the champagne which was not fit to drink, an order that filled them with pride.

I could hear the twingeing of my nerves, in which there was a sense of comfort independent of the external objects that might have produced it, a comfort which the least shifting of my body or of my attention was enough to make me feel, just as to a shut eye a slight pressure gives the sensation of colour. I had already drunk a good deal of port wine, and if I now asked for more it was not so much with a view to the comfort which the additional glasses would bring me as an effect of the comfort produced by the glasses that had gone before. I allowed the music itself to guide to each of its notes my pleasure which, meekly following, rested on each in turn. If, like one of those chemical industries by means of which are prepared in large quantities bodies which in a state of nature come together only by accident and very rarely, this restaurant at Rivebelle united at one and the same moment more women to tempt me with beckoning vistas of happiness than the hazard of walks and drives would have made me encounter in a year ; on the other hand, this music that greeted our ears,—arrangements of waltzes, of German operettas, of music-hall songs, all of them quite new to me—was itself like an ethereal resort of pleasure superimposed upon the other and more intoxicating still. For these tunes, each as individual as a woman, were not keeping, as she would have kept, for some privileged person, the voluptuous secret which they contained : they offered me their secrets, ogled me, came up to me with affected or vulgar move-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

ments, accosted me, caressed me as if I had suddenly become more seductive, more powerful and more rich ; I indeed found in these tunes an element of cruelty ; because any such thing as a disinterested feeling for beauty, a gleam of intelligence was unknown to them ; for them physical pleasures alone existed. And they are the most merciless of hells, the most gateless and imprisoning for the jealous wretch to whom they present that pleasure—that pleasure which the woman he loves is enjoying with another—as the only thing that exists in the world for her who is all the world to him. But while I was humming softly to myself the notes of this tune, and returning its kiss, the pleasure peculiar to itself which it made me feel became so dear to me that I would have left my father and mother, to follow it through the singular world which it constructed in the invisible, in lines instinct with alternate languor and vivacity. Although such a pleasure as this is not calculated to enhance the value of the person to whom it comes, for it is perceived by him alone, and although whenever, in the course of our life, we have failed to attract a woman who has caught sight of us, she could not tell whether at that moment we possessed this inward and subjective felicity which, consequently, could in no way have altered the judgment that she passed on us, I felt myself more powerful, almost irresistible. It seemed to me that my love was no longer something unattractive, at which people might smile, but had precisely the touching beauty, the seductiveness of this music, itself comparable to a friendly atmosphere in which she whom I loved and I were to meet, suddenly grown intimate.

This restaurant was the resort not only of light women ;

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

it was frequented also by people in the very best society, who came there for afternoon tea or gave big dinner-parties. The tea-parties were held in a long gallery, glazed and narrow, shaped like a funnel, which led from the entrance hall to the dining-room and was bounded on one side by the garden, from which it was separated (save for a few stone pillars) only by its wall of glass, in which panes would be opened here and there. The result of which, apart from ubiquitous draughts, was sudden and intermittent bursts of sunshine, a dazzling light that made it almost impossible to see the tea-drinkers, so that when they were installed there, at tables crowded pair after pair the whole way along the narrow gully, as they were shot with colours at every movement they made in drinking their tea or in greeting one another, you would have called it a reservoir, a stewpond in which the fisherman has collected all his glittering catch, and the fish, half out of water and bathed in sunlight, dazzle the eye as they mirror an ever-changing iridescence.

A few hours later, during dinner, which, naturally, was served in the dining-room, the lights would be turned on, although it was still quite light out of doors, so that one saw before one's eyes, in the garden, among summer-houses glimmering in the twilight, like pale spectres of evening, alleys whose greyish verdure was pierced by the last rays of the setting sun and, from the lamp-lit room in which we were dining, appeared through the glass—no longer, as one would have said of the ladies who had been drinking tea there in the afternoon, along the blue and gold corridor, caught in a glittering and dripping net—but like the vegetation of a pale and green aquarium

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of gigantic size seen by a supernatural light. People began to rise from table ; and if each party while their dinner lasted, albeit they spent the whole time examining, recognising, naming the party at the next table, had been held in perfect cohesion about their own, the attractive force that had kept them gravitating round their host of the evening lost its power at the moment when, for coffee, they repaired to the same corridor that had been used for the tea-parties ; it often happened that in its passage from place to place some party on the march dropped one or more of its human corpuscles who, having come under the irresistible attraction of the rival party, detached themselves for a moment from their own, in which their places were taken by ladies or gentlemen who had come across to speak to friends before hurrying off with an "I really must fly : I'm dining with M. So-and-So." And for the moment you would have been reminded, looking at them, of two separate nosegays that had exchanged a few of their flowers. Then the corridor too began to empty. Often, since even after dinner there was still a little light left outside, they left this long corridor unlighted, and, skirted by the trees that overhung it on the other side of the glass, it suggested a pleached alley in a wooded and shady garden. Here and there, in the gloom, a fair diner lingered. As I passed through this corridor one evening on my way out I saw, sitting among a group of strangers, the beautiful *Princesse de Luxembourg*. I raised my hat without stopping. She remembered me, and bowed her head with a smile ; in the air, far above her bowed head, but emanating from the movement, rose melodiously a few words addressed to myself, which must have

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

been a somewhat amplified good-evening, intended not to stop me but simply to complete the gesture, to make it a spoken greeting. But her words remained so indistinct and the sound which was all that I caught was prolonged so sweetly and seemed to me so musical that it seemed as if among the dim branches of the trees a nightingale had begun to sing. If it so happened that, to finish the evening with a party of his friends whom we had met, Saint-Loup decided to go on to the Casino of a neighbouring village, and, taking them with him, put me in a carriage by myself, I would urge the driver to go as fast as he possibly could, so that the minutes might pass less slowly which I must spend without having anyone at hand to dispense me from the obligation myself to provide my sensibility—reversing the engine, to to speak, and emerging from the passivity in which I was caught and held as in the teeth of a machine—with those modifications which, since my arrival at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. The risk of collision with a carriage coming the other way along those lanes where there was barely room for one and it was dark as pitch, the insecurity of the soil, crumbling in many places, at the cliff's edge, the proximity of its vertical drop to the sea, none of these things exerted on me the slight stimulus that would have been required to bring the vision and the fear of danger within the scope of my reasoning. For just as it is not the desire to become famous but the habit of being laborious that enables us to produce a finished work, so it is not the activity of the present moment but wise reflexions from the past that help us to safeguard the future. But if already, before this point, on my arrival at Rivebelle, I had flung irretrievably away from

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

me those crutches of reason and self-control which help our infirmity to follow the right road, if I now found myself the victim of a sort of moral ataxy, the alcohol that I had drunk, by unduly straining my nerves, gave to the minutes as they came a quality, a charm which did not have the result of leaving me more ready, or indeed more resolute to inhibit them, prevent their coming ; for while it made me prefer them a thousand times to anything else in my life, my exaltation made me isolate them from everything else ; I was confined to the present, as heroes are or drunkards ; eclipsed for the moment, my past no longer projected before me that shadow of itself which we call our future ; placing the goal of my life no longer in the realisation of the dreams of that past, but in the felicity of the present moment, I could see nothing now of what lay beyond it. So that, by a contradiction which, however, was only apparent, it was at the very moment in which I was tasting an unfamiliar pleasure, feeling that my life might yet be happy, in which it should have become more precious in my sight ; it was at this very moment that, delivered from the anxieties which my life had hitherto contrived to suggest to me, I unhesitatingly abandoned it to the chance of an accident. After all, I was doing no more than concentrate in a single evening the carelessness that, for most men, is diluted throughout their whole existence, in which every day they face, unnecessarily, the dangers of a sea-voyage, of a trip in an aeroplane or motor-car, when there is waiting for them at home the creature whose life, their death would shatter, or when there is still stored in the fragile receptacle of their brain that book the approaching publication of which is their one object, now, in life. And so too in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the Rivebelle restaurant, on evenings when we just stayed there after dinner, if anyone had come in with the intention of killing me, as I no longer saw, save in a distant prospect too remote to have any reality, my grandmother, my life to come, the books that I was going to write, as I clung now, body and mind, wholly to the scent of the lady at the next table, the politeness of the waiters, the outline of the waltz that the band was playing, as I was glued to my immediate sensation, with no extension beyond its limits, nor any object other than not to be separated from it, I should have died in and with that sensation, I should have let myself be strangled without offering any resistance, without a movement, a bee drugged with tobacco smoke that had ceased to take any thought for preserving the accumulation of its labours and the hopes of its hive.

I ought here to add that this insignificance into which the most serious matters subsided, by contrast with the violence of my exaltation, came in the end to include Mlle. Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of knowing them seemed to me easy now but hardly worth the trouble, for my immediate sensation alone, thanks to its extraordinary intensity, to the joy that its slightest modifications, its mere continuity provoked, had any importance for me ; all the rest, parents, work, pleasures, girls at Balbec, weighed with me no more than does a flake of foam in a strong wind that will not let it find a resting place, existed no longer save in relation to this internal power : intoxication makes real for an hour or two a subjective idealism, pure phenomenism ; nothing is left now but appearances, nothing exists save as a function of our sublime self. This is not to say that a genuine love,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

if we have one, cannot survive in such conditions. But we feel so unmistakably, as though in a new atmosphere, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of that sentiment that we can no longer consider it in the old way. It is indeed still there and we shall find it, but in a different place, no longer weighing upon us, satisfied by the sensation which the present affords it, a sensation that is sufficient for us, since for what is not actually present we take no thought. Unfortunately the coefficient which thus alters our values alters them only in the hour of intoxication. The people who had lost all their importance, whom we scattered with our breath like soap-bubbles, will to-morrow resume their density ; we shall have to try afresh to settle down to work which this evening had ceased to have any significance. A more serious matter still, these mathematics of the morrow, the same as those of yesterday, in whose problems we shall find ourselves inexorably involved, it is they that govern us even in these hours, and we alone are unconscious of their rule. If there should happen to be, near us, a woman, virtuous or inimical, that question so difficult an hour ago—to know whether we should succeed in finding favour with her—seems to us now a million times easier of solution without having become easier in any respect, for it is only in our own sight, in our own inward sight that we have altered. And she is as much annoyed with us at this moment as we shall be next day at the thought of our having given a hundred francs to the messenger, and for the same reason which in our case has merely been delayed in its operation, namely the absence of intoxication.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

because they formed a part of my intoxication just as its reflexions form part of a mirror, appeared to me now a thousand times more to be desired than the less and less existent Mlle. Simonet. One of them, young, fair, by herself, with a sad expression on a face framed in a straw hat trimmed with field-flowers, gazed at me for a moment with a dreamy air and struck me as being attractive. Then it was the turn of another, and of a third ; finally of a dark one with glowing cheeks. Almost all of them were known, if not to myself, to Saint-Loup.

He had, in fact, before he made the acquaintance of his present mistress, lived so much in the restricted world of amorous adventure that all the women who would be dining on these evenings at Rivebelle, where many of them had appeared quite by chance, having come to the coast some to join their lovers, others in the hope of finding fresh lovers there, there was scarcely one that he did not know from having spent—or if not he, one or other of his friends—at least one night in their company. He did not bow to them if they were with men, and they, albeit they looked more at him than at anyone else, for the indifference which he was known to feel towards every woman who was not his actress gave him in their eyes an exceptional interest, appeared not to know him. But you could hear them whispering : “ That’s young Saint-Loup. It seems he’s still quite gone on that girl of his. Got it bad, he has. What a dear boy ! I think he’s just wonderful ; and what style ! Some girls do have all the luck, don’t they ? And he’s so nice in every way. I saw a lot of him when I was with d’Orléans. They were quite inseparable, those two. He was going the pace, that time. But he’s given it all up now, she can’t complain.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

She's had a good run of luck, that she can say. And I ask you, what in the world can he see in her? He must be a bit of a chump, when all's said and done. She's got feet like boats, whiskers like an American, and her undies are filthy. I can tell you, a little shop girl would be ashamed to be seen in her knickers. Do just look at his eyes a moment; you would jump into the fire for a man like that. Hush, don't say a word; he's seen me; look, he's smiling. Oh, he remembers me all right. Just you mention my name to him, and see what he says!" Between these girls and him I surprised a glance of mutual understanding. I should have liked him to introduce me to them, so that I might ask them for assignations and they give them to me, even if I had been unable to keep them. For otherwise their appearance would remain for all time devoid, in my memory, of that part of itself—just as though it had been hidden by a veil—which varies in every woman, which we cannot imagine in any woman until we have actually seen it in her, and which is apparent only in the glance that she directs at us, that acquiesces in our desire and promises that it shall be satisfied. And yet, even when thus reduced, their aspect was for me far more than that of women whom I should have known to be virtuous, and it seemed to me not to be, like theirs, flat, with nothing behind it, fashioned in one piece with no solidity. It was not, of course, for me what it must be for Saint-Loup who, by an act of memory, beneath the indifference, transparent to him, of the motionless features which affected not to know him, or beneath the dull formality of the greeting that might equally well have been addressed to anyone else, could recall, could see, through dishevelled

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

locks, a swooning mouth, a pair of half-closed eyes, a whole silent picture like those that painters, to cheat their visitors' senses, drape with a decent covering. Undoubtedly, for me who felt that nothing of my personality had penetrated the surface of this woman or that, or would be borne by her upon the unknown ways which she would tread through life, those faces remained sealed. But it was quite enough to know that they did open, for them to seem to me of a price which I should not have set on them had they been but precious medals, instead of locketts within which were hidden memories of love. As for Robert, scarcely able to keep in his place at table, concealing beneath a courtier's smile his warrior's thirst for action—when I examined him I could see how closely the vigorous structure of his triangular face must have been modelled on that of his ancestors' faces, a face devised rather for an ardent bowman than for a delicate student. Beneath his fine skin the bold construction, the feudal architecture were apparent. His head made one think of those old dungeon keeps on which the disused battlements are still to be seen, although inside they have been converted into libraries.

On our way back to Balbec, of those of the fair strangers to whom he had introduced me I would repeat to myself without a moment's interruption, and yet almost unconsciously: "What a delightful woman!" as one chimes in with the refrain of a song. I admit that these words were prompted rather by the state of my nerves than by any lasting judgment. It was nevertheless true that if I had had a thousand francs on me and if there had still been a jeweller's shop open at that hour, I should have bought the lady a ring. When the successive hours

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

of our life are thus displayed against too widely dissimilar backgrounds, we find that we give away too much of ourselves to all sorts of people who next day will not interest us in the least. But we feel that we are still responsible for what we said to them overnight, and that we must honour our promises.

As on these evenings I came back later than usual to the hotel, it was with joy that I recognised, in a room no longer hostile, the bed on which, on the day of my arrival, I had supposed that it would always be impossible for me to find any rest, whereas now my weary limbs turned to it for support ; so that, in turn, thighs, hips, shoulders burrowed into, trying to adhere at every angle to the sheets that covered its mattress, as if my fatigue, like a sculptor, had wished to take a cast of an entire human body. But I could not go to sleep ; I felt the approach of morning ; peace of mind, health of body were no longer mine. In my distress it seemed that never should I recapture them. I should have had to sleep for a long time if I were to overtake them. But then, had I begun to doze, I must in any event be awakened in a couple of hours by the symphonic concert on the beach. Suddenly I was asleep, I had fallen into that deep slumber in which are opened to us a return to childhood, the recapture of past years, of lost feelings, the disincarnation, the transmigration of the soul, the evoking of the dead, the illusions of madness, retrogression towards the most elementary of the natural kingdoms (for we say that we often see animals in our dreams, but we forget almost always that we are ourself then an animal deprived of that reasoning power which projects upon things the light of certainty ; we present on the contrary to the spectacle of life only

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

a dubious vision, destroyed afresh every moment by oblivion, the former reality fading before that which follows it as one projection of a magic lantern fades before the next as we change the slide), all those mysteries which we imagine ourselves not to know and into which we are in reality initiated almost every night, as we are into the other great mystery of annihilation and resurrection. Rendered more vagabond by the difficulty of digesting my Rivebelle dinner, the successive and flickering illumination of shadowy zones of my past made of me a being whose supreme happiness would have been that of meeting Legrandin, with whom I had just been talking in my dream.

And then, even my own life was entirely hidden from me by a new setting, like the "drop" lowered right at the front of the stage before which, while the scene shifters are busy behind, actors appear in a fresh "turn". The turn in which I was now cast for a part was in the manner of an Oriental fairy-tale; I retained no knowledge of my past or of myself, on account of the intense proximity of this interpolated scenery; I was merely a person who received the bastinado and underwent various punishments for a crime the nature of which I could not distinguish, though it was actually that of having taken too much port wine. Suddenly I awoke and discovered that, thanks to a long sleep, I had not heard a note of the concert. It was already afternoon; I verified this by my watch after several efforts to sit up in bed, efforts fruitless at first and interrupted by backward falls on to my pillow, but those short falls which are a sequel of sleep as of other forms of intoxication, whether due to wine or to convalescence; besides, before I had so much

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

as looked at the time, I was certain that it was past mid-day. Last night I had been nothing more than an empty vessel, without weight, and (since I must first have gone to bed to be able to keep still, and have been asleep to be able to keep silent) had been unable to refrain from moving about and talking; I had no longer any stability, any centre of gravity, I was set in motion and it seemed that I might have continued on my dreary course until I reached the moon. But if, while I slept, my eyes had not seen the time, my body had nevertheless contrived to calculate it; had measured the hours; not on a dial superficially marked and figured, but by the steadily growing weight of all my replenished forces which, like a powerful clockwork, it had allowed, notch by notch, to descend from my brain into the rest of my body in which there had risen now to above my knees the unbroken abundance of their store. If it is true that the sea was once upon a time our native element, into which we must plunge our cooling blood if we are to recover our strength, it is the same with the oblivion, the mental non-existence of sleep; we seem then to absent ourselves for a few hours from Time, but the forces which we have gathered in that interval without expending them, measure it by their quantity as accurately as the pendulum of the clock or the crumbling pyramid of the sandglass. Nor does one emerge more easily from such sleep than from a prolonged spell of wakefulness, so strongly does everything tend to persist; and if it is true that certain narcotics make us sleep, to have slept for any time is an even stronger narcotic, after which we have great difficulty in making ourselves wake up. Like a sailor who sees plainly the harbour in which he can moor his vessel, still tossed

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

by the waves, I had a quite definite idea of looking at the time and of getting up, but my body was at every moment cast back upon the tide of sleep ; the landing was difficult, and before I attained a position in which I could reach my watch and confront with its time that indicated by the wealth of accumulated material which my stiffened limbs had at their disposal, I fell back two or three times more upon my pillow.

At length I could reach and read it : “ Two o’clock in the afternoon ! ” I rang ; but at once I returned to a slumber which, this time, must have lasted infinitely longer, if I was to judge by the refreshment, the vision of an immense night overpassed, which I found on awakening. And yet as my awakening was caused by the entry of Françoise, and as her entry had been prompted by my ringing the bell, this second sleep which, it seemed to me, must have been longer than the other, and had brought me so much comfort and forgetfulness, could not have lasted for more than half a minute.

My grandmother opened the door of my bedroom ; I asked her various questions about the Legrandin family.

It is not enough to say that I had returned to tranquillity and health, for it was more than a mere interval of space that had divided them from me yesterday, I had had all night long to struggle against a contrary tide, and now I not only found myself again in their presence, they had once more entered into me. At certain definite and still somewhat painful points beneath the surface of my empty head which would one day be broken, letting my ideas escape for all time, those ideas had once again taken their proper places and resumed that existence by which hitherto, alas, they had failed to profit.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Once again I had escaped from the impossibility of sleeping, from the deluge, the shipwreck of my nervous storms. I feared now not at all the menaces that had loomed over me the evening before, when I was dismantled of repose. A new life was opening before me ; without making a single movement, for I was still shattered, although quite alert and well, I savoured my weariness with a light heart ; it had isolated and broken asunder the bones of my legs and arms, which I could feel assembled before me, ready to cleave together, and which I was to raise to life merely by singing, like the builder in the fable.

Suddenly I thought of the fair girl with the sad expression whom I had seen at Rivebelle, where she had looked at me for a moment. Many others, in the course of the evening, had seemed to me attractive ; now she alone arose from the dark places of my memory. I had felt that she noticed me, had expected one of the waiters to come to me with a whispered message from her. Saint-Loup did not know her and fancied that she was respectable. It would be very difficult to see her, to see her constantly. But I was prepared to make any sacrifice, I thought now only of her. Philosophy distinguishes often between free and necessary acts. Perhaps there is none to the necessity of which we are more completely subjected than that which, by virtue of an ascending power held in check during the act itself, makes so unfailingly (once our mind is at rest) spring up a memory that was levelled with other memories by the distributed pressure of our indifference, and rush to the surface, because unknown to us it contained, more than any of the others, a charm of which we do not become aware until the following day. And

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

perhaps there is not, either, any act so free, for it is still unprompted by habit, by that sort of mental hallucination which, when we are in love, facilitates the invariable re-appearance of the image of one particular person.

This was the day immediately following that on which I had seen file past me against a background of sea the beautiful procession of young girls. I put questions about them to a number of the visitors in the hotel, people who came almost every year to Balbec. They could tell me nothing. Later on, a photograph shewed me why. Who could ever recognise now in them, scarcely and yet quite definitely beyond an age in which one changes so utterly, that amorphous, delicious mass, still wholly infantine, of little girls who, only a few years back, might have been seen sitting in a ring on the sand round a tent ; a sort of white and vague constellation in which one would have distinguished a pair of eyes that sparkled more than the rest, a mischievous face, flaxen hair, only to lose them again and to confound them almost at once in the indistinct and milky nebula.

No doubt, in those earlier years that were still so recent, it was not, as it had been yesterday when they appeared for the first time before me, one's impression of the group, but the group itself that had been lacking in clearness. Then those children, mere babies, had been still at that elementary stage in their formation when personality has not set its seal on every face. Like those primitive organisms in which the individual barely exists by itself, consists in the reef rather than in the coral insects that compose it, they were still pressed one against another. Sometimes one pushed her neighbour over, and then a wild laugh, which seemed the sole manifestation of their

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

personal life, convulsed them all at once, obliterating, confounding those indefinite, grinning faces in the congealment of a single cluster, scintillating and tremulous. In an old photograph of themselves, which they were one day to give me, and which I have kept ever since, their infantile troop already presents the same number of participants as, later, their feminine procession ; one can see from it that their presence must, even then, have made on the beach an unusual mark which forced itself on the attention ; but one cannot recognise them individually in it save by a process of reasoning, leaving a clear field to all the transformations possible during girlhood, up to the point at which one reconstructed form would begin to encroach upon another individuality, which must be identified also, and whose handsome face, owing to the accessories of a large build and curly hair, may quite possibly have been, once, that wizened and impish little grin which the photograph album presents to us ; and the distance traversed in a short interval of time by the physical characteristics of each of these girls making of them a criterion too vague to be of any use, whereas what they had in common and, so to speak, collectively, had at that early date been strongly marked, it sometimes happened that even their most intimate friends mistook one for another in this photograph, so much so that the question could in the last resort be settled only by some detail of costume which one of them could be certain that she herself, and not any of the others, had worn. Since those days, so different from the day on which I had just seen them strolling along the "front", so different and yet so close in time, they still gave way to fits of laughter, as I had observed that afternoon, but to laughter of a kind that was no longer

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the intermittent and almost automatic laughter of childhood, a spasmodic discharge which, in those days, had continually sent their heads dipping out of the circle, as the clusters of minnows in the Vivonne used to scatter and vanish only to gather again a moment later ; each countenance was now mistress of itself, their eyes were fixed on the goal towards which they were marching ; and it had taken, yesterday, the indecision and tremulousness of my first impression to make me confuse vaguely (as their childish hilarity and the old photograph had confused) the spores now individualised and disjoined of the pale madrepore.

Repeatedly, I dare say, when pretty girls went by, I had promised myself that I would see them again. As a rule, people do not appear a second time ; moreover our memory, which speedily forgets their existence, would find it difficult to recall their appearance ; our eyes would not recognise them, perhaps, and in the mean time we have seen new girls go by, whom we shall not see again either. But at other times, and this was what was to happen with the pert little band at Balbec, chance brings them back insistently before our eyes. Chance seems to us then a good and useful thing, for we discern in it as it were rudiments of organisation, of an attempt to arrange our life ; and it makes easy to us, inevitable, and sometimes—after interruptions that have made us hope that we may cease to remember—cruel, the retention in our minds of images to the possession of which we shall come in time to believe that we were predestined, and which but for chance we should from the very first have managed to forget, like so many others, with so little difficulty.

Presently Saint-Loup's visit drew to an end. I had

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

not seen that party of girls again on the beach. He was too little at Balbec in the afternoons to have time to bother about them, or to attempt, in my interest, to make their acquaintance. In the evenings he was more free, and continued to take me constantly to Rivebelle. There are, in those restaurants, as there are in public gardens and railway trains, people embodied in a quite ordinary appearance, whose name astonishes us when, having happened to ask it, we discover that this is not the mere inoffensive stranger whom we supposed but nothing less than the Minister or Duke of whom we have so often heard. Two or three times already, in the Rivebelle restaurant, we had—Saint-Loup and I—seen come in and sit down at a table when everyone else was getting ready to go, a man of large stature, very muscular, with regular features and a grizzled beard, gazing, with concentrated attention, into the empty air. One evening, on our asking the landlord who was this obscure, solitary and belated diner, "What !" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say you don't know the famous painter Elstir ?" Swann had once mentioned his name to me, I had entirely forgotten in what connexion ; but the omission of a particular memory, like that of part of a sentence when we are reading, leads sometimes not to uncertainty but to a birth of certainty that is premature. "He is a friend of Swann, a very well known artist, extremely good," I told Saint-Loup. Whereupon there passed over us both, like a wave of emotion, the thought that Elstir was a great artist, a celebrated man, and that, confounding us with the rest of the diners, he had no suspicion of the ecstasy into which we were thrown by the idea of his talent. Doubtless, his unconsciousness of our admiration and of our acquaintance

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

with Swann would not have troubled us had we not been at the seaside. But since we were still at an age when enthusiasm cannot keep silence, and had been transported into a life in which not to be known is unendurable, we wrote a letter, signed with both our names, in which we revealed to Elstir in the two diners seated within a few feet of him two passionate admirers of his talent, two friends of his great friend Swann, and asked to be allowed to pay our homage to him in person. A waiter undertook to convey this missive to the celebrity.

A celebrity Elstir was, perhaps, not yet at this period quite to the extent claimed by the landlord, though he was to reach the height of his fame within a very few years. But he had been one of the first to frequent this restaurant when it was still only a sort of farmhouse, and had brought to it a whole colony of artists (who had all, as it happened, migrated elsewhere as soon as the farm-yard in which they used to feed in the open air, under a lean-to roof, had become a fashionable centre); Elstir himself had returned to Rivebelle this evening only on account of a temporary absence of his wife, from the house which he had taken in the neighbourhood. But great talent, even when its existence is not yet recognised, will inevitably provoke certain phenomena of admiration, such as the landlord had managed to detect in the questions asked by more than one English lady visitor, athirst for information as to the life led by Elstir, or in the number of letters that he received from abroad. Then the landlord had further remarked that Elstir did not like to be disturbed when he was working, that he would rise in the middle of the night and take a little model down to the water's edge to pose for him, nude, if the moon was

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

shining ; and had told himself that so much labour was not in vain, nor the admiration of the tourists unjustified when he had, in one of Elstir's pictures, recognised a wooden cross which stood by the roadside as you came into Rivebelle.

"It's all right !" he would repeat with stupefaction, "there are all the four beams ! Oh, he does take a lot of trouble !" •

And he did not know whether a little *Sunrise over the Sea* which Elstir had given him might not be worth a fortune.

We watched him read our letter, put it in his pocket, finish his dinner, begin to ask for his things, get up to go ; and we were so convinced that we had shocked him by our overture that we would now have hoped (as keenly as at first we had dreaded) to make our escape without his noticing us. • We did not bear in mind for a single instant a consideration which should, nevertheless, have seemed to us most important, namely that our enthusiasm for Elstir, on the sincerity of which we should not have allowed the least doubt to be cast, which we could indeed have supported with the evidence of our breathing arrested by expectancy, our desire to do no matter what that was difficult or heroic for the great man, was not, as we imagined it to be, admiration, since neither of us had ever seen anything that he had painted ; our feeling might have as its object the hollow idea of a "great artist", but not a body of work which was unknown to us. It was, at the most, admiration in the abstract, the nervous envelope, the sentimental structure of an admiration without content, that is to say a thing as indissolubly attached to boyhood as are certain organs which have

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ceased to exist in the adult man ; we were still boys. Elstir meanwhile was reaching the door when suddenly he turned and came towards us. I was transported by a delicious thrill of terror such as I could not have felt a few years later, because, while age diminishes our capacity, familiarity with the world has meanwhile destroyed in us any inclination to provoke such strange encounters, to feel that kind of emotion.

In the course of the few words that Elstir had come back to say to us, sitting down at our table, he never gave any answer on the several occasions on which I spoke to him of Swann. I began to think that he did not know him. He asked me, nevertheless, to come and see him at his Balbec studio, an invitation which he did not extend to Saint-Loup, and which I had earned (as I might not, perhaps, from Swann's recommendation, had Elstir been intimate with him, for the part played by disinterested motives is greater than we are inclined to think in people's lives) by a few words which made him think that I was devoted to the arts. He lavished on me a friendliness, which was as far above that of Saint-Loup as that was above the affability of a mere tradesman. Compared with that of a great artist, the friendliness of a great gentleman, charming as it may be, has the effect of an actor's playing a part, of being feigned. Saint-Loup sought to please ; Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, work, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who could understand him. But, failing society that was endurable, he lived in an isolation, with a savagery which fashionable people called pose and ill-breeding, public au-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

thorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride.

And no doubt at first he had thought, even in his solitude, with enjoyment that, thanks to his work, he was addressing, in spite of distance, he was giving a loftier idea of himself to those who had misunderstood or hurt him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows, and, just as I had renounced Gilberte to appear to her again one day in more attractive colours, dedicated his work to certain people as a way of approaching them again, by which without actually seeing him they would be made to love him, admire him, talk about him ; a renunciation is not always complete from the start, when we decide upon it in our original frame of mind and before it has reacted upon us, whether it be the renunciation of an invalid, a monk, an artist or a hero.' But if he had wished to produce with certain people in his mind, in producing he had lived for himself, remote from the society to which he had become indifferent ; the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, as happens with every big thing which we have begun by fearing, because we knew it to be incompatible with smaller things to which we clung, and of which it does not so much deprive us as it detaches us from them. Before we experience it, our whole preoccupation is to know to what extent we can reconcile it with certain pleasures which cease to be pleasures as soon as we have experienced it.

Elstir did not stay long talking to us. I made up my mind that I would go to his studio during the next few days, but on the following afternoon, when I had accom-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

panied my grandmother right to the point at which the "front" ended, near the cliffs of Canapville, on our way back, at the foot of one of the little streets which ran down at right angles to the beach, we came upon a girl who, with lowered head like an animal that is being driven reluctant to its stall, and carrying golf-clubs, was walking in front of a person in authority, in all probability her or her friends' "Miss", who suggested a portrait of Jeffreys by Hogarth, with a face as red as if her favourite beverage were gin rather than tea, on which a dried smear of tobacco at the corner of her mouth prolonged the curve of a moustache that was grizzled but abundant. The girl who preceded her was like that one of the little band who, beneath a black polo-cap, had shewn in an inexpressive chubby face a pair of laughing eyes. Now, the girl who was now passing me had also a black polo-cap, but she struck me as being even prettier than the other, the line of her nose was straighter, the curve of nostril at its base fuller and more fleshy. Besides, the other had seemed a proud, pale girl, this one a child well-disciplined and of rosy complexion. And yet, as she was pushing a bicycle just like the other's, and was wearing the same reindeer gloves, I concluded that the differences arose perhaps from the angle and circumstances in which I now saw her, for it was hardly likely that there could be at Balbec a second girl, with a face that, when all was said, was so similar and with the same details in her accoutrements. She cast a rapid glance in my direction; for the next few days, when I saw the little band again on the beach, and indeed long afterwards when I knew all the girls who composed it, I could never be absolutely certain that any of them—even she who among them all was

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

most like her, the girl with the bicycle—was indeed the one that I had seen that evening at the end of the “front”, where a street ran down to the beach, a girl who differed hardly at all, but was still just perceptibly different from her whom I had noticed in the procession.

From that moment, whereas for the last few days my mind had been occupied chiefly by the tall one, it was the one with the golf-clubs, presumed to be Mlle. Simonet, who began once more to absorb my attention. When walking with the others she would often stop, forcing her friends, who seemed greatly to respect her, to stop also. Thus it is, calling a halt, her eyes sparkling beneath her polo-cap, that I see her again to-day, outlined against the screen which the sea spreads out behind her, and separated from me by a transparent, azure space, the interval of time that has elapsed since then, a first impression, faint and fine in my memory, desired, pursued, then forgotten, then found again, of a face which I have many times since projected upon the cloud of the past to be able to say to myself, of a girl who was actually in my room : “It is she !”

But it was perhaps yet another, the one with geranium cheeks and green eyes, whom I should have liked most to know. And yet, whichever of them it might be, on any given day, that I preferred to see, the others, without her, were sufficient to excite my desire which, concentrated now chiefly on one, now on another, continued—as, on the first day, my confused vision—to combine and blend them, to make of them the little world apart, animated by a life in common, which for that matter they doubtless imagined themselves to form ; and I should have penetrated, in becoming a friend of one of them—like a cultivated pagan or

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

a meticulous Christian going among barbarians—into a rejuvenating society in which reigned health, unconsciousness of others, sensual pleasures, cruelty, unintellectuality and joy.

My grandmother, who had been told of my meeting with Elstir, and rejoiced at the thought of all the intellectual profit that I might derive from his friendship, considered it absurd and none too polite of me not to have gone yet to pay him a visit. But I could think only of the little band, and being uncertain of the hour at which the girls would be passing along the front, I dared not absent myself. My grandmother was astonished, too, at the smartness of my attire, for I had suddenly remembered suits which had been lying all this time at the bottom of my trunk. I put on a different one every day, and had even written to Paris ordering new hats and neckties.

It adds a great charm to life in a watering-place like Balbec if the face of a pretty girl, a vendor of shells, cakes or flowers, painted in vivid colours in our mind, is regularly, from early morning, the purpose of each of those leisured, luminous days which we spend upon the beach. They become then, and for that reason, albeit unoccupied by any business, as alert as working-days, pointed, magnetised, raised slightly to meet an approaching moment, that in which, while we purchase sand-cakes, roses, ammonites, we will delight in seeing upon a feminine face its colours displayed as purely as on a flower. But at least, with these little traffickers, first of all we can speak to them, which saves us from having to construct with our imagination their aspects other than those with which the mere visual perception of them furnishes us, and to recreate their life, magnifying its charm, as

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

when we stand before a portrait ; moreover, just because we speak to them, we can learn where and at what time it will be possible to see them again. Now, I had none of these advantages with respect to the little band. Their habits were unknown to me ; when on certain days I failed to catch a glimpse of them, not knowing the cause of their absence I sought to discover whether it was something fixed and regular, if they were to be seen only every other day, or in certain states of the weather, or if there were days on which no one ever saw them. I imagined myself already friends with them, and saying : “ But you weren’t there the other day ? ” “ Weren’t we ? Oh, no, of course not ; that was because it was a Saturday. On Saturdays we don’t ever come, because . . . ” If it were only as simple as that, to know that on black Saturday it was useless to torment oneself, that one might range the beach from end to end, sit down outside the pastry-cook’s and pretend to be nibbling an *éclair*, poke into the curiosity shop, wait for bathing time, the concert, high tide, sunset, night, all without seeing the longed-for little band. But the fatal day did not, perhaps, come once a week. It did not, perhaps, of necessity fall on Saturdays. Perhaps certain atmospheric conditions influenced it or were entirely unconnected with it. How many observations, patient but not at all serene, must one accumulate of the movements, to all appearance irregular, of those unknown worlds before being able to be sure that one has not allowed oneself to be led astray by mere coincidence, that one’s forecasts will not be proved wrong, before one elucidates the certain laws, acquired at the cost of so much painful experience, of that passionate astronomy. Remembering that I had not yet seen them on

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

some particular day of the week, I assured myself that they would not be coming, that it was useless to wait any longer on the beach. And at that very moment I caught sight of them. And yet on another day which, so far as I could suppose that there were laws that guided the return of those constellations, must, I had calculated, prove an auspicious day, they did not come. But to this primary uncertainty whether I should see them or not that day, there was added another, more disquieting : whether I should ever set eyes on them again, for I had no reason, after all, to know that they were not about to sail for America, or to return to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to love them. One can feel an attraction towards a particular person. But to release that fount of sorrow, that sense of the irreparable, those agonies which prepare the way for love, there must be—and this is, perhaps, more than any person can be, the actual object which our passion seeks so anxiously to embrace—the risk of an impossibility. Thus there were acting upon me already those influences which recur in the course of our successive love-affairs, which can, for that matter, be provoked, (but then rather in the life of cities) by the thought of little working girls whose half-holiday is we know not on what day, and whom we are afraid of having missed as they came out of the factory ; or which at least have recurred in mine. Perhaps they are inseparable from love ; perhaps everything that formed a distinctive feature of our first love attaches itself to those that come after, by recollection, suggestion, habit, and through the successive periods of our life gives to its different aspects a general character.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

I seized every pretext for going down to the beach at the hours when I hoped to succeed in finding them there. Having caught sight of them once while we were at luncheon, I now invariably came in late for it, waiting interminably upon the "front" for them to pass; devoting all the short time that I did spend in the dining-room to interrogating with my eyes its azure wall of glass; rising long before the dessert, so as not to miss them should they have gone out at a different hour, and chafing with irritation at my grandmother, when, with unwitting malevolence, she made me stay with her past the hour that seemed to me propitious. I tried to prolong the horizon by setting my chair aslant; if, by chance, I did catch sight of no matter which of the girls, since they all partook of the same special essence, it was as if I had seen projected before my face in a shifting, diabolical hallucination, a little of the unfriendly and yet passionately coveted dream which, but a moment ago, had existed only—where it lay stagnant for all time—in my brain.

I was in love with none of them, loving them all, and yet the possibility of meeting them was in my daily life the sole element of delight, alone made to burgeon in me those high hopes by which every obstacle is surmounted, hopes ending often in fury if I had not seen them. For the moment, these girls eclipsed my grandmother in my affection; the longest journey would at once have seemed attractive to me had it been to a place in which they might be found. It was to them that my thoughts comfortably clung when I supposed myself to be thinking of something else or of nothing. But when, even without knowing it, I thought of them, they, more

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

unconsciously still, were for me the mountainous blue undulations of the sea, a troop seen passing in outline against the waves. Our most intensive love for a person is always the love, really, of something else as well.

Meanwhile my grandmother was shewing, because now I was keenly interested in golf and lawn-tennis and was letting slip an opportunity of seeing at work and hearing talk an artist whom she knew to be one of the greatest of his time, a disapproval which seemed to me to be based on somewhat narrow views. I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Élysées, and had since established to my own satisfaction, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman but the depth of the state ; and that the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more essential than would be reached by the pleasure that we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

I was to end by complying with my grandmother's wishes, all the more reluctantly in that Elstir lived at some distance from the "front" in one of the newest of Balbec's avenues. The heat of the day obliged me to take the tramway which passed along the Rue de la Plage, and I made an effort (so as still to believe that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the country it might be, of King Mark, or upon the site of the Forest of Broceliande) not to see the gimcrack splen-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

dour of the buildings that extended on either hand, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuously hideous, in spite of which he had taken it, because, of all that there were to be had at Balbec, it was the only one that provided him with a really big studio.

It was also with averted eyes that I crossed the garden, which had a lawn—in miniature, like any little suburban villa round Paris—a statuette of an amorous gardener, glass balls in which one saw one's distorted reflexion, beds of begonias and a little arbour, beneath which rocking chairs were drawn up round an iron table. But after all these preliminaries hall-marked with philistine ugliness, I took no notice of the chocolate mouldings on the plinths once I was in the studio ; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of many forms which I had not, hitherto, isolated from the general spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me as the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world in which, from the chaos that is all the things we see, he had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were hung everywhere about the room, here a wave of the sea crushing angrily on the sand its lilac foam, there a young man in a suit of white linen, leaning upon the rail of a vessel. His jacket and the spattering wave had acquired fresh dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even although they were deprived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to splash nor the jacket to clothe anyone.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

At the moment at which I entered, the creator was just finishing, with the brush which he had in his hand, the form of the sun at its setting.

The shutters were closed almost everywhere round the studio, which was fairly cool and, except in one place where daylight laid against the wall its brilliant but fleeting decoration, dark ; there was open only one little rectangular window embowered in honeysuckle, which, over a strip of garden, gave on an avenue ; so that the atmosphere of the greater part of the studio was dusky, transparent and compact in the mass, but liquid and sparkling at the rifts where the golden clasp of sunlight banded it, like a lump of rock crystal of which one surface, already cut and polished, here and there, gleams like a mirror with iridescent rays. While Elstir, at my request, went on painting, I wandered about in the half-light, stopping to examine first one picture, then another.

Most of those that covered the walls were not what I should chiefly have liked to see of his work, paintings in what an English art journal which lay about on the reading-room table in the Grand Hotel called his first and second manners, the mythological manner and the manner in which he shewed signs of Japanese influence, both admirably exemplified, the article said, in the collection of Mme. de Guermantes. Naturally enough, what he had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here, at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the things represented *i.e.* it, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

them anew. The names which denote things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with itself.

Sometimes in my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the fastenings of the curtains that shut out the light, in the evening when I was waiting until it should be time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would re-establish between the elements that distinction which in my first impression I had overlooked. In the same way I used, in Paris, in my bedroom, to hear a dispute, almost a riot, in the street below, until I had referred back to its cause—a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me—this noise, from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, with poetic vision, it was from those that Elstir's work was taken. One of his metaphors that occurred most commonly in the seascapes which he had round him was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed every line of demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and at which I now stood gazing my fill—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself came cranking in among the land, as constantly happened on the 'Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as it had been by mill-chimneys or church-steeple) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the far distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a particoloured rainbow, to form an unreal, a mystical picture. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between earth and ocean. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing across the middle of the town ; women who were gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, after the ringlike barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the side nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet unharmed in the path of a miraculously averted tide. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea entered into the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was everywhere apparent ; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour, where the sea was rough, you felt from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the obliquity of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erectness of the warehouse on the harbour, the church, the houses of the town to which some of the figures were returning while others were coming out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water, as it might be a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated them. A party of holiday makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road ; their boatman, blithe but attentive, also, to what he was doing, trimmed the bellying sail, every one kept in his place, so that the weight should not be all on one side of the boat, which might capsize, and so they went racing over sunlit fields into shadowy places, dashing down into

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the troughs of waves. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful activities that must first be neutralised in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that its reflexions had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight, parts which the perspective of the picture dovetailed in among others. Or rather you would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm, a little farther all of one colour with the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that you thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the surface of which it was quite frightening to see a ship go climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised and broken surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Although we are justified in saying that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that the artist who begins afresh upon his own account an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered by the efforts of all the others, we must nevertheless admit that, in so far as art brings into prominence certain laws, once an industry has taken those laws and

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

vulgarised them, the art that was first in the field loses, in retrospect, a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are called "admirable" photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual picture of a familiar object, a picture different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly impressive to us because it startles us, makes us emerge from our habits and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these "magnificent" photographs will illustrate a law of perspective, will shew us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected point of view from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting a spur out from the bank of the river, from which it is actually a long way off. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him exactly to this point; he gave special emphasis to certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since his art had been their first interpreter. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent contact of the cliffs on either side of it, would look as though there had been hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea appeared to be enclosed in walls of pink

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

granite, not to be the sea, which began farther out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what, when one looked at the picture, seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact inhaling the moist vapour of the shifting tide. Other laws were discernible in the same canvas, as, at the foot of immense cliffs, the lilliputian grace of white sails on the blue mirror on whose surface they looked like butterflies asleep, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the pallidity of the light. This play of light and shade, which also photography has rendered commonplace, had interested Elstir so much that at one time he had painted what were almost mirages, in which a castle crowned with a tower appeared as a perfect circle of castle prolonged by a tower at its summit, and at its foot by an inverted tower, whether because the exceptional purity of the atmosphere on a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and brightness of the stone, or because the morning mists rendered the stone as vaporous as the shadow. And similarly, beyond the sea, behind a line of woods, began another sea roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was, in fact, the sky. The light, as it were precipitating new solids, thrust back the hull of the boat on which it fell behind the other hull that was still in shadow, and rearranged like the steps of a crystal staircase what was materially a plane surface, but was broken up by the play of light and shade upon the morning sea. A river running beneath the bridges of a town was caught from a certain point of view so that it appeared entirely dislocated, now broadened into a lake, now narrowed into a rivulet, broken elsewhere by the interruption of a hill crowned with trees

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

among which the burgher would repair at evening to taste the refreshing breeze ; and the rhythm of this disintegrated town was assured only by the inflexible uprightness of the steeples which did not rise but rather, following the plumb line of the pendulum marking its cadence as in a triumphal march, seemed to hold in suspense beneath them all the confused mass of houses that rose vaguely in the mist along the banks of the crushed, disjointed stream. And (since Elstir's earliest work belonged to the time in which a painter would make his landscape attractive by inserting a human figure), on the cliff's edge or among the mountains, the road, that half human part of nature, underwent, like river or ocean, the eclipses of perspective. And whether a sheer wall of mountain, or the mist blown from a torrent, or the sea prevented the eye from following the continuity of the path, visible to the traveller but not to us, the little human personage in old-fashioned attire seemed often to be stopped short on the edge of an abyss, the path which he had been following ending there, while, a thousand feet above him in those pine-forests, it was with a melting eye and comforted heart that we saw reappear the threadlike whiteness of its dusty surface, hospitable to the wayfaring foot, whereas from us the side of the mountain had hidden, where it turned to avoid waterfall or gully, the intervening bends.

The effort made by Elstir to strip himself, when face to face with reality, of every intellectual concept, was all the more admirable in that this man who, before sitting down to paint, made himself deliberately ignorant, forgot, in his honesty of purpose, everything that he knew, since what one knows ceases to exist by itself, had in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

reality an exceptionally cultivated mind. When I confessed to him the disappointment that I had felt upon seeing the porch at Balbec : "What !" he had exclaimed, "you were disappointed by the porch ! Why, it's the finest illustrated Bible that the people have ever had. That Virgin, and all the bas-reliefs telling the story of her life, they are the most loving, the most inspired expression of that endless poem of adoration and praise in which the middle ages extolled the glory of the Madonna. If you only knew, side by side with the most scrupulous accuracy in rendering the sacred text, what exquisite ideas the old carver had, what profound thoughts, what delicious poetry !

"A wonderful idea, that great sheet in which the angels are carrying the body of the Virgin, too sacred for them to venture to touch it with their hands" ; (I mentioned to him that this theme had been treated also at Saint-André-des-Champs ; he had seen photographs of the porch there, and agreed, but pointed out that the bustling activity of those little peasant figures, all hurrying at once towards the Virgin, was not the same thing as the gravity of those two great angels, almost Italian, so springing, so gentle) "the angel who is carrying the Virgin's soul, to reunite it with her body ; in the meeting of the Virgin with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's gesture when she touches the Virgin's Womb and marvels to feel that it is great with child ; and the bandaged arm of the midwife who had refused, unless she touched, to believe the Immaculate Conception ; and the linen cloth thrown by the Virgin to Saint Thomas to give him a proof of the Resurrection ; that veil, too, which the Virgin tears from her own bosom to cover the nakedness of her

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Son, from Whose Side the Church receives in a chalice the Wine of the Sacrament, while, on His other side the Synagogue, whose kingdom is at an end, has its eyes bandaged, holds a half-broken sceptre and lets fall, with the crown that is slipping from its head, the tables of the old law ; and the husband who, on the Day of Judgment, as he helps his young wife to rise from her grave, lays her hand against his own heart to reassure her, to prove to her that it is indeed beating, is that such a trumpery idea, do you think, so stale and commonplace ? And the angel who is taking away the sun and the moon, henceforth useless, since it is written that the Light of the Cross shall be seven times brighter than the light of the firmament ; and the one who is dipping his hand in the water of the Child's bath, to see whether it is warm enough ; and the one emerging from the clouds to place the crown upon the Virgin's brow, and all the angels who are leaning from the vault of heaven, between the balusters of the New Jerusalem, and throwing up their arms with terror or joy at the sight of the torments of the wicked or the bliss of the elect ! For it is all the circles of heaven, a whole gigantic poem full of theology and symbolism that you have before you there. It is fantastic, mad, divine, a thousand times better than anything you will see in Italy, where for that matter this very tympanum has been carefully copied by sculptors with far less genius. There never was a time when genius was universal ; that is all nonsense ; it would be going beyond the age of gold. The fellow who carved that front, you may make up your mind that he was every bit as great, that he had just as profound ideas as the men you admire most at the present day. I could shew

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

you what I mean if we went there together. There are certain passages from the Office of the Assumption which have been rendered with a subtilty of expression that Redon himself has never equalled."

This vast celestial vision of which he spoke to me, this gigantic theological poem which, I understood, had been inscribed there in stone, yet when my eyes, big with desire, had opened to gaze upon the front of Balbec church, it was not these things that I had seen. I spoke to him of those great statues of saints, which, mounted on scaffolds, formed a sort of avenue on either side.

"It starts from the mists of antiquity to end in Jesus Christ," he explained. "You see on one side His ancestors after the spirit, on the other the Kings of Judah, His ancestors after the flesh. All the ages are there. And if you had looked more closely at what you took for scaffolds you would have been able to give names to the figures standing on them. At the feet of Moses you would have recognised the calf of gold, at Abraham's the ram and at Joseph's the demon counselling Potiphar's wife."

I told him also that I had gone there expecting to find an almost Persian building, and that this had doubtless been one of the chief factors in my disappointment. "Indeed, no," he assured me, "it is perfectly true. Some parts of it are quite oriental; one of the capitals reproduces so exactly a Persian subject that you cannot account for it by the persistence of Oriental traditions. The carver must have copied some casket brought from the East by explorers." And he did indeed shew me, later on, the photograph of a capital on which I saw dragons that were almost Chinese devouring one another,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

but at Balbec this little piece of carving had passed unnoticed by me in the general effect of the building which did not conform to the pattern traced in my mind by the words, "an almost Persian church".

The intellectual pleasures which I enjoyed in this studio did not in the least prevent me from feeling, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, the warm polish, the sparkling gloom of the place itself and, through the little window framed in honeysuckle, in the avenue that was quite rustic, the resisting dryness of the sun-parched earth, screened only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and of a tree-cast shade. Perhaps the unaccountable feeling of comfort which this summer day was giving me came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*.

I had supposed Elstir to be a modest man, but I realised my mistake on seeing his face cloud with melancholy when, in a little speech of thanks, I uttered the word "fame". Men who believe that their work will last—as was the case with Elstir—form the habit of placing that work in a period when they themselves will have crumbled into dust. And thus, by obliging them to reflect on their own extinction, the thought of fame saddens them because it is inseparable from the thought of death. I changed the conversation in the hope of driving away the cloud of ambitious melancholy with which unwittingly I had loaded Elstir's brow. "Some one advised me once," I began, thinking of the conversation we had had with Legrandin at Combray, as to which I was glad of an opportunity of learning Elstir's views, "not to visit Brittany, because it would not be wholesome for

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

a mind with a natural tendency to dream." "Not at all ;" he replied. "When the mind has a tendency to dream, it is a mistake to keep dreams away from it, to ration its dreams. So long as you distract your mind from its dreams, it will not know them for what they are ; you will always be being taken in by the appearance of things, because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time. One must have a thorough understanding of one's dreams if one is not to be troubled by them ; there is a way of separating one's dreams from one's life which so often produces good results that I ask myself whether one ought not, at all costs, to try it, simply as a preventive, just as certain surgeons make out that we ought, to avoid the risk of appendicitis later on, to have all our appendices taken out when we are children."

Elstir and I had meanwhile been walking about the studio, and had reached the window that looked across the garden on to a narrow avenue, a side-street that was almost a country lane. We had gone there to breathe the cooler air of the late afternoon. I supposed myself to be nowhere near the girls of the little band, and it was only by sacrificing for once the hope of seeing them that I had yielded to my grandmother's prayers and had gone to see Elstir. For where the thing is to be found that we are seeking we never know, and often we steadily, for a long time, avoid the place to which, for quite different reasons, everyone has been asking us to go. But we never suspect that we shall there see the very person of whom we are thinking. I looked out vaguely over the country road which, outside the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

studio, passed quite close to it but did not belong to Elstir. Suddenly there appeared on it, coming along it at a rapid pace, the young bicyclist of the little band, with, over her dark hair, her polo-cap pulled down towards her plump cheeks, her eyes merry and almost importunate; and on that auspicious path, miraculously filled with promise, of delights, I saw her beneath the trees throw to Elstir the smiling greeting of a friend, a rainbow that bridged the gulf for me between our terraqueous world and regions which I had hitherto regarded as inaccessible. She even came up to give her hand to the painter, though without stopping, and I could see that she had a tiny beauty spot on her chin. "Do you know that girl, sir?" I asked Elstir, realising that he could if he chose make me known to her, could invite us both to the house. And this peaceful studio with its rural horizon was at once filled with a surfeit of delight such as a child might feel in a house where he was already happily playing when he learned that, in addition, out of that bounteousness which enables lovely things and noble hosts to increase their gifts beyond all measure, there was being prepared for him a sumptuous repast. Elstir told me that she was called Albertine Simonet, and gave me the names also of her friends, whom I described to him with sufficient accuracy for him to identify them almost without hesitation. I had, with regard to their social position, made a mistake, but not the mistake that I usually made at Balbec. I was always ready to take for princes the sons of shopkeepers when they appeared on horseback. This time I had placed in an interloping class the daughters of a set of respectable people, extremely rich, belonging to the world of industry and busi-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ness. It was the class which, on first thoughts, interested me least, since it held for me neither the mystery of the lower orders nor that of a society such as the *Guermantes* frequented. And no doubt if an inherent quality, a rank which they could never forfeit had not been conferred on them, in my dazzled eyes, by the glaring vacuity of the seaside life all round them, I should perhaps not have succeeded in resisting and overcoming the idea that they were the daughters of prosperous merchants. I could not help marvelling to see how the French middle class was a wonderful studio full of sculpture of the noblest and most varied kind. What unimagined types, what richness of invention in the character of their faces, what firmness, what freshness, what simplicity in their features. The shrewd old money-changers from whose loins these *Dianas* and these nymphs had sprung seemed to me to have been the greatest of statuaries. Before I had time to register the social metamorphosis of these girls—so are these discoveries of a mistake, these modifications of the notion one has of a person instantaneous as a chemical combination—there was already installed behind their faces, so street-arab in type that I had taken them for the mistresses of racing bicyclists, of boxing champions, the idea that they might easily be connected with the family of some lawyer or other whom we knew. I was barely conscious of what was meant by *Albertine Simonet*; she had certainly no conception of what she was one day to mean to me. Even the name, *Simonet*, which I had already heard spoken on the beach, if I had been asked to write it down I should have spelt with a double 'n', never dreaming of the importance which this family attached to there being but one in their name.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

In proportion as we descend the social scale our snobishness fastens on to mere nothings which are perhaps no more null than the distinctions observed by the aristocracy, but, being more obscure, more peculiar to the individual, take us more by surprise. Possibly there had been Simonnets who had done badly in business, or something worse still even. The fact remains that the Simonets never failed, it appeared, to be annoyed if anyone doubled their 'n'. They wore the air of being the only Simonets in the world with one 'n' instead of two, and were as proud of it, perhaps, as the Montmorency family were of being the premier barons of France. I asked Elstir whether these girls lived at Balbec; yes, he told me, some of them at any rate. The villa in which one of them lived was at that very spot, right at the end of the beach, where the cliffs of Canapville began. As this girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet, this was another reason for me to believe that it was indeed the latter whom I had met that day when I was with my grandmother. There were of course so many of those little streets running down to the beach, and all at the same angle, that I could not have pointed out exactly which of them it had been. One would like always to remember a thing accurately, but at the time one's vision was clouded. And yet that Albertine and the girl whom I had seen going to her friend's house were one and the same person was a practical certainty. In spite of which, whereas the countless images that have since been furnished me by the dark young golfer, however different they may have been from one another, have overlaid one another (because I now know that they all belong to her), and if I retrace the thread of my

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

memories I can, under cover of that identity, and as though along a tunnelled passage, pass through all those images in turn without losing my consciousness of the same person behind them all, if, on the other hand, I wish to revert to the girl whom I passed that day when I was with my grandmother, I must escape first into freer air. I am convinced that it is Albertine whom I find there, the same girl as her who would often stop dead among her moving comrades, in her walk along the foreground of the sea ; but all those more recent images remain separate from that earlier one because I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she had not for me at the moment in which she caught my eye ; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the angle of the little street and the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.

My hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had at first disturbed me, combined with the reasons already given to allow me later on, even at the time of my greater—my second—passion for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and very brief liberty to abstain from loving her. From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated itself on her, my love kept, now and then, between itself and the image of Albertine a certain “play” of light and shade which enabled it, like a badly fitted lamp, to flit over the surface of each of the others before settling its focus upon her ; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

to me necessary ; I might perhaps have managed to co-ordinate it with the image of another person. Which enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish reality altogether, not only external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an internal state in which I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character, of the person whom I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and purely subjective.

"Not a day passes but one or the other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two," Elstir told me, plunging me in despair when I thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should, in all probability, long since have made Albertine's acquaintance.

She had passed on ; from the studio she was no longer in sight. I supposed that she had gone to join her friends on the "front". Could I have appeared there suddenly with Elstir, I should have got to know them all. I thought of endless pretexts for inducing him to take a turn with me on the beach. I had no longer the same peace of mind as before the apparition of the girl in the frame of the little window ; so charming until then in its fringe of honeysuckle, and now so drearily empty. Elstir caused me a joy that was tormenting also when he said that he would go a little way with me, but that he must first finish the piece of work on which he was engaged. It was a flower study but not one of any of the flowers, portraits of which I would rather have commissioned him to paint than the portrait of a person, so that I might learn from the revelation of his genius what I had so often sought in vain from the flowers them-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

selves—hawthorn white and pink, cornflowers, apple-blossom. Elstir as he worked talked botany to me, but I scarcely listened; he was no longer sufficient in himself, he was now only the necessary intermediary between these girls and me; the distinction which, only a few moments ago, his talent had still given him in my eyes was now worthless save in so far as it might confer a little on me also in the eyes of the little band to whom I should be presented by him.

I paced up and down the room, impatient for him to finish what he was doing; I picked up and examined various sketches, any number of which were stacked against the walls. In this way I happened to bring to light a water-colour which evidently belonged to a much earlier period in Elstir's life, and gave me that particular kind of enchantment which is diffused by works of art not only deliciously executed but representing a subject so singular and so seductive that it is to it that we attribute a great deal of their charm, as if the charm were something that the painter had merely to uncover, to observe, realised already in a material form by nature, and to reproduce in art. That such objects can exist, beautiful quite apart from the painter's interpretation of them, satisfies a sort of innate materialism in us, against which our reason contends and acts as a counterpoise to the abstractions of aesthetics. It was—this water-colour—the portrait of a young woman, by no means beautiful but of a curious type, in a close-fitting mob-cap not unlike a "billy-cock" hat, trimmed with a ribbon of cherry-coloured silk; in one of her mittened hands was a lighted cigarette, while the other held, level with her knee, a sort of broad-brimmed garden hat, nothing more than a fire-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

screen of plaited straw to keep off the sun. On a table by her side, a tall vase filled with pink carnations. Often (and it was the case here) the singularity of such works is due principally to their having been executed in special conditions for which we do not at first sight make proper allowance, if, for instance, the strange attire of a feminine model is her costume for a masked ball, or conversely the scarlet cloak which an elderly man looks as though he had put on to humour some whim in the painter is his gown as a professor or alderman or his cardinal's cassock. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait now confronted me arose, without my understanding it, from the fact that she was a young actress of an earlier generation half dressed for a part. But the cap or hat, beneath which the hair stuck out but was cut short, the velvet coat opening without lapels over a white shirt-front, made me hesitate as to the period of the clothes and the sex of the model, so that I did not know what it was exactly that I was holding before my eyes, unless simply the brightest coloured of these scraps of painting. And the pleasure which it afforded me was disturbed only by the fear that Elstir, by delaying further, would make me miss the girls, for the sun was now declining and hung low in the little window. Nothing in this water-colour was merely stated there as a fact and painted because of its utility to the composition, the costume because the young woman must be wearing something, the vase to hold the flowers. The glass of the vase, cherished for its own sake, seemed to be holding the water in which the stems of the carnations were dipped in something as limpid, almost as liquid as itself; the woman's dress encompassed her in a manner that had an inde-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

pendent, a brotherly charm, and, if the works of man can compete in charm with the wonders of nature, as delicate, as pleasing to the touch of the eye, as freshly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a flower, the feathers of a dove. The whiteness of the shirt-front, fine as driven rain, with its gay pleats gathered into little bells like lilies of the valley, was starred with bright gleams of light from the room, as sharply edged and as finely shaded as though they had been posies of flowers stitched on the woven lawn. And the velvet of the coat, brilliant with a milky sheen, had here and there a roughness, a scoring, a shagginess on its surface which made one think of the crumpled brightness of the carnations in the vase. But above all one felt that Elstir, sublimely indifferent to whatever immoral suggestion there might be in this disguise of a young actress for whom the talent with which she would play her part on the stage was doubtless of less importance than the irritant attraction which she would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished and farther on reappeared with a suggestion rather of an effeminate youth, vicious and pensive, then fled once more to remain uncapturable. The dreamy sadness in the expression of her eyes, by the mere fact of its contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of love-making and play-acting, was not the least dis-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

turbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it effective to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed "*Miss Sacripant* : October, 1872." I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young ; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me !" he cried, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and, though, I assure you, the young person in the billy-cock hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding it staring her in the face. I have kept it only as an amusing sidelight on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it his careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme. Elstir, who could only delay us still further. The window sill was already aglow. Our excursion would be a pure waste of time. There was no longer the slightest chance of our seeing the girls, consequently it mattered now not at all how soon Mme. Elstir left us or how long she stayed. Not that she did stay for any length of time. I found her most tedious ; she might have been beautiful, once, at

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

twenty, driving an ox in the Roman Campagna, but her dark hair was streaked with grey and she was common without being simple, because she believed that a pompous manner and majestic attitudes were required by her statuesque beauty, which, however, advancing age had robbed of all its charm. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity. And it was touching, but at the same time surprising to hear Elstir, whenever he opened his mouth, and with a respectful gentleness, as if merely uttering the words moved him to tenderness and veneration, repeat: "My beautiful Gabrielle!" Later on, when I had become familiar with Elstir's mythological paintings, Mme. Elstir acquired beauty in my eyes also. I understood then that to a certain ideal type illustrated by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout his work, to a certain canon of art he had attributed a character that was almost divine, since the whole of his time, all the mental effort of which he was capable, in a word his whole life he had consecrated to the task of distinguishing those lines as clearly and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult so solemn, so exacting that it never allowed him to be satisfied with what he had achieved; was the most intimate part of himself; and so he had never been able to look at it from a detached standpoint, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it realised outside, apart from himself, in the body of a woman, the body of her who in due course, became Mme. Elstir and in whom he had been able (as one is able only with something that is not oneself) to find it meritorious, moving, god-like. How comforting, moreover, to let his lips rest upon that

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Beauty which hitherto he had been obliged with so great labour to extract from within himself, whereas now, mysteriously incarnate, it offered itself to him in a series of communions, filled with saving grace. Elstir at this period was no longer in that early youth in which we look only to the power of our own mind for the realisation of our ideal. He was nearing the age at which we count on bodily satisfactions to stimulate the forces of the brain, at which the exhaustion of the brain inclining us to materialism and the diminution of our activity to the possibility of influences passively received, begin to make us admit that there may indeed be certain bodies, certain callings, certain rhythms that are privileged, realising so naturally our ideal that even without genius, merely by copying the movement of a shoulder, the tension of a throat, we can achieve a masterpiece, it is the age at which we like to caress Beauty with our eyes objectively, outside ourselves, to have it near us, in a tapestry, in a lovely sketch by Titian picked up in a second-hand shop, in a mistress as lovely as Titian's sketch. When I understood this I could no longer look without pleasure at Mme. Elstir, and her body began to lose its heaviness, for I filled it with an idea, the idea that she was an immaterial creature, a portrait by Elstir. She was one for me, and for him also I dare say. The facts of life have no meaning for the artist, they are to him merely an opportunity for exposing the naked blaze of his genius. One feels unmistakably, when one sees side by side ten portraits of different people painted by Elstir, that they are all, first and foremost, Elstirs. Only, after this rising tide of genius, which sweeps over and submerges a man's life, when the brain begins to tire, gradually the balance

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

is upset and, like a river that resumes its course after the counterflow of a spring tide, it is life that once more takes the upper hand. While the first period lasted, the artist has gradually evolved the law, the formula of his unconscious gift. He knows what situations, should he be a novelist—if a painter, what scenes furnish him with the subject matter, which may be anything in the world but, whatever it is, is essential to his researches as a laboratory might be or a workshop. He knows that he has created his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, the action of remorse upon consciousness of guilt, out of women posed beneath trees or half-immersed in water, like statues. A day will come when, owing to the exhaustion of his brain, he will no longer have the strength, when provided with those materials which his genius was wont to use, to make the intellectual effort which alone can produce his work, and will yet continue to seek them out, happy when he finds himself in their presence, because of the spiritual pleasure, the allurements to work that they arouse in him ; and, surrounding them besides with a kind of hedge of superstition as if they were superior to all things else, as if in them already dwelt a great part of the work of art which they might be said to carry within them ready made, he will confine himself to the company, to the adoration of his models. He will hold endless conversations with the repentant criminals whose remorse, their regeneration formed, when he still wrote, the subject of his novels ; he will buy a country house in a district where mists attenuate the light, he will spend long hours gazing at the limbs of bathing women ; will collect sumptuous stuffs. And thus the beauty of life, a phase that has to some extent lost its

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

meaning, a stage beyond the boundaries of art at which I had already seen Swann come to rest, was that also which, by a slackening of the creative ardour, idolatry of the forms which had inspired it, desire to avoid effort, must ultimately arrest an Elstir's progress.

At last he had applied the final brush-stroke to his flowers ; I sacrificed a minute to look at them ; I acquired no merit by the act, for I knew that there was no chance now of our finding the girls on the beach ; and yet, had I believed them to be still there, and that these wasted moments would make me miss them, I should have stopped to look none the less, for I should have told myself that Elstir was more interested in his flowers than in my meeting with the girls. My grandmother's nature, a nature that was the exact counterpart of my complete egoism, was nevertheless reflected in certain aspects of my own. In circumstances in which someone to whom I was indifferent, for whom I had always made a show of affection or respect, ran the risk merely of some unpleasantness whereas I was in real danger, I could not have done otherwise than commiserate with him on his annoyance as though it had been something important, and treat my own danger as nothing, because I would feel that these were the proportions in which he must see things. To be quite accurate, I would go even farther, and not only not complain of the danger in which I myself stood but go half-way to meet it, and with that which involved other people try, on the contrary, were I to increase the risk of my being caught myself, to avert it from them. The reasons for this are several, none of which does me the slightest credit. One is that if, while only my reason was employed, I have always believed

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

in self-preservation, whenever in the course of my existence I have found myself obsessed by moral anxieties, or merely by nervous scruples, so puerile often that I dare not enumerate them here, if an unforeseen circumstance then arose, involving for me the risk of being killed, this new preoccupation was so trivial in comparison with the others that I welcomed it with a sense of relief, almost of hilarity. Thus I find myself, albeit the least courageous of men, to have known that feeling which has always seemed to me, in my reasoning moods, so foreign to my nature, so inconceivable, the intoxication of danger. But even although I were, when any, even a deadly peril threatened me, passing through an entirely calm and happy phase, I could not, were I with another person, refrain from sheltering him behind me and choosing for myself the post of danger. When a sufficient store of experience had taught me that I invariably acted, and enjoyed acting thus, I discovered—and was deeply ashamed by the discovery—that it was because, in contradiction of what I had always believed and asserted, I was extremely sensitive to the opinions of others. Not that this kind of unconfessed self-esteem is in any sense vanity or conceit. For what might satisfy one or other of those failings would give me no pleasure, and I have always refrained from indulging them. But with the people in whose company I have succeeded in concealing most effectively the slight advantages a knowledge of which might have given them a less derogatory idea of myself, I have never been able to deny myself the pleasure of shewing them that I take more trouble to avert the risk of death from their path than from my own. As my motive is then self-esteem and not valour, I find it quite natural that in any

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

crisis they should act differently. I am far from blaming them for it, as I should perhaps if I had been moved by a sense of duty, a duty which would seem to me, in that case, to be as incumbent upon them as upon myself. On the contrary, I feel that it is eminently sensible of them to safeguard their lives, though at the same time I cannot prevent my own safety from receding into the background, which is particularly silly and culpable of me since I have come to realise that the lives of many of the people in front of whom I plant myself when a bomb bursts are more valueless even than my own. However, on the day of this first visit to Elstir, the time was still distant at which I was to become conscious of this difference in value, and there was no question of danger, but simply—a harbinger this of that pernicious self-esteem—the question of my not appearing to attach to the pleasure which I so ardently desired more importance than to the work which the painter had still to finish. It was finished at last. And, once we were out of doors, I discovered that—so long were the days still at this season—it was not so late as I had supposed; we strolled down to the “front”. What stratagems I employed to keep Elstir standing at the spot where I thought that the girls might still come past. Pointing to the cliffs that towered beside us, I kept on asking him to tell me about them, so as to make him forget the time and stay there a little longer. I felt that we had a better chance of waylaying the little band if we moved towards the end of the beach. “I should like to look at those cliffs with you from a little nearer,” I said to him, having noticed that one of the girls was in the habit of going in that direction. “And as we go, do tell me about Carquethuit. I should so like

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

to see Carquethuit," I went on, without thinking that the so novel character which manifested itself with such force in Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*, might belong perhaps rather to the painter's vision than to any special quality in the place itself. "Since I've seen your picture, I think that is where I should most like to go, there and to the Pointe du Raz, but of course that would be quite a journey from here." "Yes, and besides, even if it weren't nearer, I should advise you perhaps all the same to visit Carquethuit," he replied. "The Pointe du Raz is magnificent, but after all it is simply the high cliff of Normandy or Brittany which you know already. Carquethuit is quite different, with those rocks bursting from a level shore. I know nothing in France like it, it reminds me rather of what one sees in some parts of Florida. It is most interesting, and for that matter extremely wild too. It is between Clitourps and Nehomme ; you know how desolate those parts are ; the sweep of the coast-line is delicious. Here, the coast-line is like anywhere else ; but along there I can't tell you what charm it has, what softness."

Night was falling ; it was time to be turning homewards ; I was escorting Elstir in the direction of his villa when suddenly, as it were Mephistopheles springing up before Faust, there appeared at the end of the avenue—like simply an objectification, unreal, diabolical, of the temperament diametrically opposed to my own, of the semi-barbarous and cruel vitality of which I, in my weakness, my excess of tortured sensibility and intellectuality was so destitute—a few spots of the essence impossible to mistake for anything else in the world, a few spores of the zoophytic band of girls, who wore an air of not having seen me but were unquestionably, for all that, proceeding as

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

they advanced to pass judgment on me in their ironic vein. Feeling that a collision between them and us was now inevitable, and that Elstir would be certain^d to call me, I turned my back, like a bather preparing to meet the shock of a wave ; I stopped dead and, leaving my eminent companion to pursue his way, remained where I was, stooping, as if I had suddenly become engrossed in it, towards the window of the curiosity shop which we happened to be passing at the moment. I was not sorry to give the appearance of being able to think of something other than these girls, and I was already dimly aware that when Elstir did call me up to introduce me to them I should wear that sort of challenging expression which betokens not surprise but the wish to appear as though one were surprised—so far is every one of us a bad actor, or everyone else a good thought-reader ;—that I should even go so far as to point a finger to my breast, as who should ask “It is me, really, that you want ?” and then run to join him, my head lowered in compliance and docility and my face coldly masking my annoyance at being torn from the study of old pottery in order to be introduced to people whom I had no wish to know. Meanwhile I explored the window and waited for the moment in which my name, shouted by Elstir, would come to strike me like an expected and innocuous bullet. The certainty of being introduced to these girls had had the result of making me not only feign complete indifference to them, but actually to feel it. Inevitable from this point, the pleasure of knowing them began at once to shrink, became less to me than the pleasure of talking to Saint-Loup, of dining with my grandmother, of making, in the neighbourhood of Balbec, excursions which I would regret the probability, in conse-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

quence of my having to associate with people who could scarcely be much interested in old buildings, of my being forced to abandon. Moreover, what diminished the pleasure which I was about to feel was not merely the imminence but the incoherence of its realisation. Laws as precise as those of hydrostatics maintain the relative position of the images which we form in a fixed order, which the coming event at once upsets. Elstir was just about to call me. This was not at all the fashion in which I had so often, on the beach, in my bedroom, imagined myself making these girls' acquaintance. What was about to happen was a different event, for which I was not prepared. I recognised neither my desire nor its object ; I regretted almost that I had come out with Elstir. But, above all, the shrinking of the pleasure that I expected to feel was due to the certainty that nothing, now, could take that pleasure from me. And it resumed, as though by some latent elasticity in itself, its whole extent when it ceased to be subjected to the pressure of that certainty, at the moment when, having decided to turn my head, I saw Elstir, standing where he had stopped a few feet away with the girls, bidding them good-bye. The face of the girl who stood nearest to him, round and plump and glittering with the light in her eyes, reminded me of a cake on the top of which a place has been kept for a morsel of blue sky. Her eyes, even when fixed on an object, gave one the impression of motion, just as on days of high wind the air, although invisible, lets us perceive the speed with which it courser between us and the unchanging azure. For a moment her gaze intersected mine, like those travelling skies on stormy days which hurry after a rain-cloud that moves less rapidly than they, overtake,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

touch, cover, pass it and are gone ; but they do not know one another, and are soon driven far apart. So our eyes were for a moment confronted, neither pair knowing what the celestial continent that lay before their gaze held of future blessing or disaster. Only at the moment when her gaze was directly coincident with mine, without slackening its movement it grew perceptibly duller. So on a starry night the wind-swept moon passes behind a cloud and veils her brightness for a moment, but soon will shine again. But Elstir had already said good-bye to the girls, and had never summoned me. They disappeared down a cross street ; he came towards me. My whole plan was spoiled.

I have said that Albertine had not seemed to me that day to be the same as on previous days and that afterwards, each time I saw her, she was to appear different. But I felt at that moment that certain modifications in the appearance, the importance, the stature of a person may also be due to the variability of certain states of consciousness interposed between that person and us. One of those that play an important part in such transformations is belief (that evening my belief, then the vanishing of my belief that I was about to know Albertine had, with a few seconds' interval only, rendered her almost insignificant then infinitely precious in my sight ; some years later, the belief, then the disappearance of the belief that Albertine was faithful to me brought about similar changes.

Of course, long ago, at Combray ; I had seen shrink or stretch, according to the time of day, according as I was entering one or the other of the two dominant moods that governed my sensibility in turn, my grief at not having

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

my mother with me, as imperceptible all afternoon as is the moon's light when the sun is shining, and then, when night had come, reigning alone in my anxious heart in the place of recent memories now obliterated. But on that day at Balbec, when I saw that Elstir was leaving the girls and had not called me, I learned for the first time that the variations in the importance which a pleasure or a pain has in our eyes may depend not merely on this alternation of two moods, but on the displacement of invisible beliefs, such, for example, as make death seem to us of no account because they bathe it in a glow of unreality, and thus enable us to attach importance to our attending an evening party, which would lose much of its charm for if, on the announcement that we were sentenced to die by the guillotine, the belief that had bathed the party in its warm glow was instantly shattered ; and this part that belief plays, it is true that something in me was aware of it ; this was my will ; but its knowledge is vain if the mind, the heart continue in ignorance ; these last act in good faith when they believe that we are anxious to forsake a mistress to whom our will alone knows that we are still attached. This is because they are clouded by the belief that we shall see her again at any moment. But let this belief be shattered, let them suddenly become aware that this mistress is gone from us for ever, then the mind and heart, having lost their focus, are driven like mad things, the meanest pleasure becomes infinitely great.

Variance of a belief, annulment also of love, which, pre-existent and mobile, comes to rest at the image of any one woman simply because that woman will be almost impos-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

sible of attainment. Thenceforward we think not so much of the woman of whom we find difficulty in forming an exact picture, as of the means of getting to know her. A whole series of agonies develops and is sufficient to fix our love definitely upon her who is its almost unknown object. Our love becomes immense ; we never dream how small a place in it the real woman occupies. And if suddenly, as at the moment when I had seen Elstir stop to talk to the girls, we cease to be uneasy, to suffer pain, since it is this pain that is the whole of our love, it seems to us as though love had abruptly vanished at the moment when at length we grasp the prey to whose value we had not given enough thought before. What did I know of Albertine ? One or two glimpses of a profile against the sea, less beautiful, assuredly, than those of Veronese's women whom I ought, had I been guided by purely aesthetic reasons, to have preferred to her. By what other reasons could I be guided, since, my anxiety having subsided, I could recapture only those mute profiles ; I possessed nothing of her besides. Since my first sight of Albertine I had meditated upon her daily, a thousandfold, I had carried on with what I called by her name an interminable unspoken dialogue in which I made her question me, answer me, think and act, and in the infinite series of imaginary Albertines who followed one after the other in my fancy, hour after hour, the real Albertine, a glimpse caught on the beach, figured only at the head, just as the actress who creates a part, the star, appears, out of a long series of performances, in the few first alone. That Albertine was scarcely more than a silhouette, all that was superimposed being of my

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

own growth, so far when we are in love does the contribution that we, ourself make outweigh—even if we consider quantity only—those that come to us from the beloved object. And the same is true of love that is given its full effect. There are loves that manage not only to be formed but to subsist around a very little core—even among those whose prayer has been answered after the flesh. An old drawing-master who had taught my grandmother had been presented by some obscure mistress with a daughter. The mother died shortly after the birth of her child, and the drawing-master was so broken-hearted that he did not long survive her. In the last months of his life my grandmother and some of the Combray ladies, who had never liked to make any allusion in the drawing-master's presence to the woman, with whom, for that matter, he had not officially "lived" and had had comparatively slight relations, took it into their heads to ensure the little girl's future by combining to purchase an annuity for her. It was my grandmother who suggested this ; several of her friends made difficulties ; after all was the child really such a very interesting case, was she even the child of her reputed father ; with women like that, it was never safe to say. Finally, everything was settled. The child came to thank the ladies. She was plain, and so absurdly like the old drawing-master as to remove every shadow of doubt ; her hair being the only nice thing about her, one of the ladies said to her father, who had come with her : "What pretty hair she has." And thinking that now, the woman who had sinned being dead and the old man only half alive, a discreet allusion to that past of which they had always pretended to know nothing could do no harm, my grandmother added : "It runs

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

in families. Did her mother have pretty hair like that ? ”
“ I don’t know,” was the old man’s quaint answer “ I never saw her except with a hat on.”

But I must not keep Elstir waiting. I caught sight of myself in a glass. To add to the disaster of my not having been introduced to the girls, I noticed that my necktie was all crooked, my hat left long wisps of hair shewing, which did not become me ; but it was a piece of luck, all the same, that they should have seen me, even thus attired, in Elstir’s company and so could not forget me ; also that I should have put on, that morning, at my grandmother’s suggestion, my smart waistcoat, when I might so easily have been wearing one that was simply hideous, and be carrying my best stick. For while an event for which we are longing never happens quite in the way we have been expecting, failing the advantages on which we supposed that we might count, others present themselves for which we never hoped, and make up for our disappointment ; and we have been so dreading the worst that in the end we are inclined to feel that, taking one thing with another, chance has, on the whole, been rather kind to us.

“ I did so much want to know them,” I said as I reached Elstir. “ Then why did you stand a mile away ? ” These were his actual words, not that they expressed what was in his mind, since, if his desire had been to grant mine, to call me up to him would have been quite easy, but perhaps because he had heard phrases of this sort, in familiar use among common people when they are in the wrong, and because even great men are in certain respects much the same as common people, take their every-day excuses from the same common stock just as they get their

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

daily bread from the same baker ; or it may be that such expressions (which ought, one might almost say, to be read "backwards", since their literal interpretation is the opposite of the truth) are the instantaneous effect, the negative exposure of a reflex action. "They were in a hurry." It struck me that of course they must have stopped him from summoning a person who did not greatly attract them ; otherwise he would not have failed, after all the questions that I had put to him about them, and the interest which he must have seen that I took in them, to call me. "We were speaking just now of Carquethuit," he began, as we walked towards his villa. "I have done a little sketch, in which you can see much better how the beach curves. The painting is not bad, but it is different. If you will allow me, just to cement our friendship, I would like to give you the sketch," he went on, for the people who refuse us the objects of our desire are always ready to offer us something else.

"I should very much like, if you have such a thing, a photograph of the little picture of Miss Sacripant. 'Sacripant'—that's not a real name, surely?" "It is the name of a character the sitter played in a stupid little musical comedy." "But, I assure you, sir, I have never set eyes on her ; you look as though you thought that I knew her." Elstir was silent. "It isn't Mme. Swann, before she was married?" I hazarded, in one of those sudden fortuitous stumblings upon the truth, which are rare enough in all conscience, and yet give, in the long run, a certain cumulative support to the theory of presentiments, provided that one takes care to forget all the wrong guesses that would invalidate it. Elstir did not reply. The portrait was indeed that of Odette de Cr  cy. She

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

had preferred not to keep it for many reasons, some of them obvious. But there were others less apparent. The portrait dated from before the point at which Odette, disciplining her features, had made of her face and figure that creation the broad outlines of which her hairdressers, her dressmakers, she herself—in her way of standing, of speaking, of smiling, of moving her hands, her eyes, of thinking—were to respect throughout the years to come. It required the vitiated tastes of a surfeited lover to make Swann prefer to all the countless photographs of the “sealed pattern” Odette which was his charming wife the little photographs which he kept in his room and in which, beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies, you saw a thin young woman, not even good-looking, with bunched out hair and drawn features.

But apart from this, had the portrait been not anterior, like Swann’s favourite photograph, to the systematisation of Odette’s features in a fresh type, majestic and charming, but subsequent to it, Elstir’s vision would alone have sufficed to disorganise that type. Artistic genius in its reactions is like those extremely high temperatures which have the power to disintegrate combinations of atoms which they proceed to combine afresh in a diametrically opposite order, following another type. All that artificially harmonious whole into which a woman has succeeded in bringing her limbs and features, the persistence of which every day, before going out, she studies in her glass, changing the angle of her hat, smoothing her hair, exercising the sprightliness in her eyes, so as to ensure its continuity, that harmony the keen eye of the great painter instantly destroys, substituting for it a rearrangement of the woman’s features such as will satisfy a certain pic-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

torial ideal of femininity which he carries in his head. Similarly it often happens that, after a certain age, the eye of a great seeker after truth will find everywhere the elements necessary to establish those relations which alone are of interest to him. Like those craftsmen, those players who, instead of making a fuss and asking for what they cannot have, content themselves with the instrument that comes to their hand, the artist might say of anything, no matter what, that it would serve his purpose. Thus a cousin of the *Princesse de Luxembourg*, a beauty of the most queenly type, having succumbed to a form of art which was new at that time, had asked the leading painter of the naturalist school to do her portrait. At once the artist's eye had found what he sought everywhere in life. And on his canvas there appeared, in place of the proud lady, a street-boy, and behind him a vast, sloping, purple background which made one think of the *Place Pigalle*. But even without going so far as that, not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not seek in the least to give satisfaction to various demands on the woman's part—such as for instance, when she begins to age, make her have herself photographed in dresses that are almost those of a young girl, which bring out her still youthful figure and make her appear like the sister, or even the daughter of her own daughter, who, if need be, is tricked out for the occasion as a “perfect fright” by her side—it will, on the contrary, emphasise those very drawbacks which she seeks to hide, and which (as for instance a feverish, that is to say a livid complexion) are all the more tempting to him since they give his picture “character”; they are quite enough, however, to destroy all the illusions of the ordinary man who, when he sees the picture,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

sees crumble into dust the ideal which the woman herself has so proudly sustained for him, which has placed her in her unique, her unalterable form so far apart, so far above the rest of humanity. Fallen now, represented otherwise than in her own type in which she sat unsassailably enthroned, she is become nothing more than just an ordinary woman, in the legend of whose superiority we have lost all faith. In this type we are so accustomed to regard as included not only the beauty of an Odette but her personality, her identity, that standing before the portrait which has thus transposed her from it we are inclined to protest not simply "How plain he has made her!" but "Why, it isn't the least bit like her!" We find it hard to believe that it can be she. We do not recognise her. And yet there is a person there on the canvas whom we are quite conscious of having seen before. But that person is not Odette; the face of the person, her body, her general appearance seem familiar. They recall to us not this particular woman who never held herself like that, whose natural pose had no suggestion of any such strange and teasing arabesque in its outlines, but other women, all the women whom Elstir has ever painted, women whom invariably, however they may differ from one another, he has chosen to plant thus on his canvas facing you, with an arched foot thrust out from under the skirt, a large round hat in one hand, symmetrically corresponding at the level of the knee which it hides to what also appears as a disc, higher up in the picture, the face. And furthermore, not only does a portrait by the hand of genius disintegrate and destroy a woman's type, as it has been defined by her coquetry and her selfish conception of beauty, but if it is also old, it is

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

not content with ageing the original in the same way as a photograph ages its sitter, by shewing her dressed in the fashions of long ago. In a portrait, it is not only the manner the woman then had of dressing that dates it, there is also the manner the artist had of painting. And this, Elstir's earliest manner, was the most damaging of birth certificates for Odette because it not only established her, as did her photographs of the same period, as the younger sister of various time-honoured courtesans, but made her portrait contemporary with the countless portraits that Manet or Whistler had painted of all those vanished models, models who already belonged to oblivion or to history.

It was along this train of thought, meditated in silence by the side of Elstir as I accompanied him to his door, that I was being led by the discovery that I had just made of the identity of his model, when this original discovery caused me to make a second, more disturbing still, involving the identity of the artist. He had painted the portrait of Odette de Crécy. Could it possibly be that this man of genius, this sage, this eremite, this philosopher with his marvellous flow of conversation, who towered over everyone and everything, was the foolish, corrupt little painter who had at one time been "taken up" by the Verdurins? I asked him if he had known them, whether by any chance it was he that they used to call M. Biche. He answered me in the affirmative, with no trace of embarrassment, as if my question referred to a period in his life that was ended and already somewhat remote, with no suspicion of what a cherished illusion his words were shattering in me, until looking up he read my disappointment upon my face. His own assumed an expression of an-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

noyance. And, as we were now almost at the gate of his house, a man of less outstanding eminence, in heart and brain, might simply have said "good-bye" to me, a trifle dryly, and taken care to avoid seeing me again. This however was not Elstir's way with me ; like the master that he was—and this was, perhaps, from the point of view of sheer creative genius, his one fault, that he was a master in that sense of the word, for an artist if he is to live the true life of the spirit in its full extent, must be alone and not bestow himself with profusion, even upon disciples—from every circumstance, whether involving himself or other people, he sought to extract, for the better edification of the young, the element of truth that it contained. He chose therefore, rather than say anything that might have avenged the injury to his pride, to say what he thought would prove instructive to me. "There is no man," he began, "however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man—so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise—unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. I know that there are young fellows, the sons and grandsons of famous men, whose masters have instilled into them nobility of mind and moral refinement in their schooldays. They have, perhaps, when they look back upon their past lives, nothing to retract ; they can, if they choose, publish a signed account of everything they have ever said or done ;

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

but they are poor creatures, feeble descendants of doctrinaires, and their wisdom is negative and sterile. We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you are not the result of training at home, by a father, or by masters at school, they have sprung from beginnings of a very different order, by reaction from the influence of everything evil or commonplace that prevailed round about them. They represent a struggle and a victory. I can see that the picture of what we once were, in early youth, may not be recognisable and cannot, certainly, be pleasing to contemplate in later life. But we must not deny the truth of it, for it is evidence that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups—assuming that one is a painter—extracted something that goes beyond them.” Meanwhile we had reached his door. I was disappointed at not having met the girls. But after all there was now the possibility of meeting them again later on; they had ceased to do no more than pass beyond a horizon on which I had been ready to suppose that I should never see them reappear. Around them no longer swirled that sort of great eddy which had separated me from them, which had been merely the expression of the perpetually active desire, mobile, compelling, fed ever on fresh anxieties, which was aroused in me by their inaccessibility, their

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

flight from me, possibly for ever. My desire for them, I could now set it at rest, hold it in reserve, among all those other desires the realisation of which, as soon as I knew it to be possible, I would cheerfully postpone. I took leave of Elstir ; I was alone once again. Then all of a sudden, despite my recent disappointment, I saw in my mind's eye all that chain of coincidence which I had not supposed could possibly come about, that Elstir should be a friend of those very girls, that they who only that morning had been to me merely figures in a picture with the sea for background had seen me, had seen me walking in friendly intimacy with a great painter, who was now informed of my secret longing and would no doubt do what he could to assuage it. All this had been a source of pleasure to me, but that pleasure had remained hidden ; it was one of those visitors who wait before letting us know that they are in the room until all the rest have gone and we are by ourselves. Then only do we catch sight of them, and can say to them, " I am at your service," and listen to what they have to tell us. Sometimes between the moment at which these pleasures have entered our consciousness and the moment at which we are free to entertain them, so many hours have passed, we have in the interval seen so many people that we are afraid lest they should have grown tired of waiting. But they are patient, they do not grow tired, and as soon as the crowd has gone we find them there ready for us. Sometimes it is then we who are so exhausted that it seems as though our weary mind will not have the strength left to seize and retain those memories, those impressions for which our frail self is the one habitable place, the sole means of realisation. And we should regret that failure, for existence to

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

us is hardly interesting save on the days on which the dust of realities is shot with magic sand, on which some trivial incident of life becomes a spring of romance. Then a whole promontory of the inaccessible world rises clear in the light of our dream, and enters into our life, our life in which, like the sleeper awakened, we actually see the people of whom we have been so ardently dreaming that we came to believe that we should never behold them save in our dreams.

The sense of comfort that I drew from the probability of my now being able to meet the little band whenever I chose was all the more precious to me because I should not have been able to keep watch for them during the next few days, which would be taken up with preparations for Saint-Loup's departure. My grandmother was anxious to offer my friend some proof of her gratitude for all the kindnesses that he had shewn to her and myself. I told her that he was a great admirer of Proudhon, and this put it into her head to send for a collection of autograph letters by that philosopher which she had once bought ; Saint-Loup came to her room to look at them on the day of their arrival, which was also his last day at Balbec. He read them eagerly, fingering each page with reverence, trying to get the sentences by heart ; and then, rising from the table, was beginning to apologise to my grandmother for having stayed so long, when he heard her say : "No, no ; take them with you ; they are for you to keep ; that was why I sent for them, to give them to you."

He was overpowered by a joy which he could no more control than we can a physical condition that arises without the intervention of our will. He blushed scarlet as a

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

child who has just been whipped, and my grandmother was a great deal more touched to see all the efforts that he was making (without success) to control the joy that convulsed him than she would have been to hear any words of thanks that he could have uttered. But he, fearing that he had failed to shew his gratitude properly, begged me to make his excuses to her again, next day, leaning from the window of the little train of the local railway company which was to take him back to his regiment. The distance was, as a matter of fact, nothing. He had thought of going, as he had frequently done that summer, when he was to return the same evening and was not encumbered with luggage, by road. But this time he would have had, anyhow, to put all his heavy luggage in the train. And he found it simpler to take the train himself also, following the advice of the manager who, on being consulted, replied that "Carriage or train, it was more or less equivocal." He meant us to understand that they were equivalent (in fact, very much what Françoise would have expressed as "coming to as near as made no difference"). "Very well," Saint-Loup had decided, "I will take the 'little crawler'." I should have taken it too, had I not been tired, and gone with my friend to Doncières ; failing this I kept on promising, all the time that we waited in the Balbec station—the time, that is to say, which the driver of the little train spent in waiting for unpunctual friends, without whom he refused to start, and also in seeking some refreshment for himself—to go over there and see him several times a week. As Bloch had come to the station also—much to Saint-Loup's disgust—the latter, seeing that our companion could hear him begging me to come to luncheon, to dinner, to stay altogether

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

at Doncières, finally turned to him and, in the most forbidding tone, intended to counteract the forced civility of the invitation and to prevent Bloch from taking it seriously : " If you ever happen to be passing through Doncières any afternoon when I am off duty, you might ask for me at the barracks ; but I hardly ever am off duty." Perhaps, also, Robert feared lest, if left to myself, I might not come, and, thinking that I was more intimate with Bloch than I made out, was providing me in this way with a travelling companion, one who would urge me on.

I was afraid that this tone, this way of inviting a person while warning him not to come, might have wounded Bloch, and felt that Saint-Loup would have done better, saying nothing. But I was mistaken, for after the train had gone, while we were walking back together as far as the crossroads at which we should have to part, one road going to the hotel, the other to the Blochs' villa, he never ceased from asking me on what day we should go to Doncières, for after " all the civilities that Saint-Loup had shewn " him, it would be " too unmannerly " on his part not to accept the invitation. I was glad that he had not noticed, or was so little displeased as to wish to let it be thought that he had not noticed on how far from pressing, how barely polite a note the invitation had been sounded. At the same time I should have liked Bloch, for his own sake, to refrain from making a fool of himself by going over at once to Doncières. But I dared not offer a piece of advice which could only have offended him by hinting that Saint-Loup had been less pressing than himself impressed. He was a great deal too ready to respond, and even if all his faults of this nature were atoned for by remarkable qualities which others, with more reserve

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

than he, would not possess, he carried indiscretion to a pitch that was almost maddening. The week must not, to hear him speak, pass without our going to Doncières (he said "our" for I think that he counted to some extent on my presence there as an excuse for his own). All the way home, opposite the gymnasium, in its grove of trees, opposite the lawn-tennis courts, the mayor's office, the shell-fish stall, he stopped me, imploring me to fix a day, and, as I did not, left me in a towering rage, saying: "As your lordship pleases. For my part, I am obliged to go since he has invited me."

Saint-Loup was still so much afraid of not having thanked my grandmother properly that he charged me once again to express his gratitude to her a day or two later in a letter I received from him from the town in which he was quartered, a town which seemed, on the envelope where the post-mark had stamped its name, to be hastening to me across country, to tell me that within its walls, in the Louis XVI cavalry barracks, he was thinking of me. The paper was embossed with the arms of Marsantes, in which I could make out a lion, surmounted by a coronet formed by the cap of a Peer of France.

"After a journey which," he wrote, "passed pleasantly enough, with a book I bought at the station, by Arvède Barine (a Russian author, I fancy; it seemed to me remarkably well written for a foreigner, but you shall give me your critical opinion, you are bound to know all about it, you fount of knowledge who have read everything), here I am again in the thick of this debased existence, where, alas, I feel a sad exile, not having here what I had to leave at Balbec; this life in which I cannot discover one affectionate memory, any intellectual attraction; an

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

environment on which you would probably look with contempt—and yet it has a certain charm. Everything seems to have changed since I was last here, for in the interval one of the most important periods in my life, that from which our friendship dates, has begun. I hope that it may never come to an end. I have spoken of our friendship, of you, to one person only, to the friend I told you of, who has just paid me a surprise visit here. She would like immensely to know you, and I feel that you would get on well together, for she too is extremely literary. I, on the other hand, to go over in my mind all our talk, to live over again those hours which I never shall forget, have shut myself off from my comrades, excellent fellows, but altogether incapable of understanding that sort of thing. This remembrance of moments spent with you I should almost have preferred, on my first day here, to call up for my own solitary enjoyment, without writing. But I was afraid lest you, with your subtle mind and ultra-sensitive heart, might, if you did not hear from me, needlessly torment yourself, if, that is to say, you still condescend to occupy your thoughts with this blunt trooper whom you will have a hard task to polish and refine, and make a little more subtle and worthier of your company."

On the whole this letter, in its affectionate spirit, was not at all unlike those which, when I did not yet know Saint-Loup, I had imagined that he would write to me, in those daydreams from which the coldness of his first greeting had shaken me by bringing me face to face with an icy reality which was not, however, to endure. Once I had received this letter, whenever, at luncheon-time, the post was brought in, I could tell at once when it was from

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

him that a letter came, for it had always that second face which a person assumes when he is absent, in the features of which (the characters of his script) there is no reason why we should not suppose that we are tracing an individual soul just as much as in the line of a nose or the inflexions of a voice.

I would now gladly remain at the table while it was being cleared, and, if it was not a moment at which the girls of the little band might be passing, it was no longer solely towards the sea that I would turn my eyes. Since I had seen such things depicted in water-colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished, as though for their poetic beauty, the broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another, the swollen convexity of a discarded napkin upon which the sun would patch a scrap of yellow velvet, the half-empty glass which thus shewed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides, and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, a dreg of wine, dusky but sparkling with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colour of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half-plundered dish, the chairs, like a group of old ladies, that came twice daily to take their places round the white cloth spread on the table as on an altar at which were celebrated the rites of the palate, where in the hollows of oyster-shells a few drops of lustral water had gathered as in tiny holy water stoups of stone; I tried to find beauty there where I had never imagined before that it could exist, in the most ordinary things, in the profundities of "still life".

When, some days after Saint-Loup's departure, I had

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

succeeded in persuading Elstir to give a small tea-party, at which I was to meet Albertine, that freshness of appearance, that smartness of attire, both (alas) fleeting, which were to be observed in me at the moment of my starting out from the Grand Hotel, and were due respectively to a longer rest than usual and to special pains over my toilet, I regretted my inability to reserve them (and also the credit accruing from Elstir's friendship) for the captivation of some other, more interesting person ; I regretted having to use them all up on the simple pleasure of making Albertine's acquaintance. My brain assessed this pleasure at a very low value now that it was assured me. But, inside, my will did not for a moment share this illusion, that will which is the persevering and unalterable servant of our successive personalities ; hiding itself in secret places, despised, down-trodden, untiringly faithful, toiling without intermission and with no thought for the variability of the self, its master, if only that master may never lack what he requires. Whereas at the moment when we are just about to start on a long-planned and eagerly awaited holiday, our brain, our nerves begin to ask themselves whether it is really worth all the trouble involved, the will, knowing that those lazy masters would at once begin to consider their journey the most wonderful experience, if it became impossible for them to take it, the will leaves them explaining their difficulties outside the station, multiplying their hesitations ; but busies itself with taking the tickets and putting us into the carriage before the train starts. It is as invariable as brain and nerves are fickle, but as it is silent, gives no account of its actions, it seems almost non-existent ; it is

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

by its dogged determination that the other constituent parts of our personality are led, but without seeing it, while they distinguish clearly all their own uncertainties. My nerves and brain then started a discussion as to the real value of the pleasure that there would be in knowing Albertine, while I studied in the glass vain and perishable attractions which nerves and brain would have preserved intact for use on some other occasion. But my will would not let the hour pass at which I must start, and it was Elstir's address that it called out to the driver. Brain and nerves were at liberty, now that the die was cast, to think this "a pity." If my will had given the man a different address, they would have been finely "sold".

When I arrived at Elstir's, a few minutes later, my first impression was that Mlle. Simonet was not in the studio. There was certainly a girl sitting there in a silk frock, bareheaded, but one whose marvellous hair, her nose, meant nothing to me, in whom I did not recognise the human entity that I had formed out of a young cyclist strolling past, in a polo-cap, between myself and the sea. It was Albertine, nevertheless. But even when I knew it to be her, I gave her no thought. On entering any social gathering, when we are young, we lose consciousness of our old self, we become a different man, every drawing-room being a fresh universe, in which, coming under the sway of a new moral perspective, we fasten our attention, as if they were to matter to us for all time, on people, dances, card-tables, all of which we shall have forgotten by the morning. Obligated to follow, if I was to arrive at the goal of conversation with Albertine, a road in no way of my own planning, which first brought me to a halt at Elstir, passed by other groups of guests to whom

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

I was presented, then along the table, at which I was offered, and ate a strawberry tart or two, while I listened, motionless, to the music that was beginning in another part of the room, I found myself giving to these various incidents the same importance as to my introduction to Mlle. Simonet, an introduction which was now nothing more than one among several such incidents, having entirely forgotten that it had been, but a few minutes since, my sole object in coming there that day. But is it not ever thus in the bustle of daily life, with every true happiness, every great sorrow. In a room full of other people we receive from her whom we love the answer, propitious or fatal, which we have been awaiting for the last year. But we must go on talking, ideas come, one after another, forming a smooth surface which is pricked, at the very most, now and then by a dull throb from within of the memory, deep-rooted enough but of very slender growth, that misfortune has come upon us. If, instead of misfortune, it is happiness, it may be that not until many years have elapsed will we recall that the most important event in our sentimental life occurred without our having time to give it any prolonged attention, or even to become aware of it almost, at a social gathering, it may have been, to which we had gone solely in expectation of that event.

When Elstir asked me to come with him so that he might introduce me to Albertine, who was sitting a little farther down the room, I first of all finished eating a coffee *éclair* and, with a show of keen interest, asked an old gentleman whose acquaintance I had just made (and thought that I might, perhaps, offer him the rose in my buttonhole which he had admired) to tell me more about

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

the old Norman fairs. This is not to say that the introduction which followed did not give me any pleasure, nor assume a definite importance in my eyes. But so far as the pleasure was concerned, I was not conscious of it, naturally, until some time later, when, once more in the hotel, and in my room alone, I had become myself again. Pleasure in this respect is like photography. What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative film ; we develop it later, when we are at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner dark-room, the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people.

If my consciousness of the pleasure it had brought me was thus retarded by a few hours, the importance of this introduction I felt immediately. At such moments of introduction, for all that we feel ourselves to have been suddenly enriched, to have been furnished with a pass that will admit us henceforward to pleasures which we have been pursuing for weeks past, but in vain, we realise only too clearly that this acquisition puts an end for us not merely to hours of toilsome search—a relief that could only fill us with joy—but also to the very existence of a certain person, her whom our imagination had wildly distorted, our anxious fear that we might never become known to her enlarged. At the moment when our name sounds on the lips of the person introducing us, especially if he amplifies it, as Elstir was now doing, with a flattering account of us—in that sacramental moment, as when in a fairy tale the magician commands a person suddenly to become someone else, she to whose presence we have been longing to attain vanishes ; how could she remain the same when, for one thing—owing to the attention

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

which the stranger is obliged to pay to the announcement of our name and the sight of our person—in the eyes that only yesterday were situated at an infinite distance (where we supposed that our eyes, wandering, uncontrolled, desperate, divergent, would never succeed in meeting them) the conscious gaze, the incommunicable thought which we have been seeking have been miraculously and quite simply replaced by our own image, painted in them as though behind the glass of a smiling mirror. If this incarnation of ourself in the person who seems to differ most from us is what does most to modify the appearance of the person to whom we have just been introduced, the form of that person still remains quite vague ; and we are free to ask ourself whether she will turn out to be a god, a table or a basin. But, as nimble as the wax-modellers who will fashion a bust before our eyes in five minutes, the few words which the stranger is now going to say to us will substantiate her form, will give her something positive and final that will exclude all the hypotheses by which, a moment ago, our desire, our imagination were being tempted. Doubtless, even before her coming to this party, Albertine had ceased to be to me simply that sole phantom worthy to haunt our life which is what remains of a passing stranger, of whom we know nothing and have caught but the barest glimpse. Her relation to Mme. Bontemps had already restricted the scope of those marvellous hypotheses, by stopping one of the channels along which they might have spread. As I drew closer to the girl, and began to know her better, my knowledge of her underwent a process of subtraction, all the factors of imagination and desire giving place to a notion which was worth infinitely less, a notion to which, it

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

must be admitted, there was added presently what was more or less the equivalent, in the domain of real life, of what joint stock companies give one, after paying interest on one's capital, and call a bonus. Her name, her family connexions had been the original limit set to my suppositions. Her friendly greeting while, standing close beside her, I saw once again the tiny mole on her cheek, below her eye, marked another stage; last of all, I was surprised to hear her use the adverb "perfectly" (in place of "quite") of two people whom she mentioned, saying of one: "She is perfectly mad, but very nice for all that," and of the other, "He is a perfectly common man, a perfect bore." However little to be commended this use of "perfectly" may be, it indicates a degree of civilisation and culture which I could never have imagined as having been attained by the bacchante with the bicycle, the frenzied muse of the golf-course. Nor did it mean that after this first transformation Albertine was not to change again for me, many times. The good and bad qualities which a person presents to us, exposed to view on the surface of his or her face, rearrange themselves in a totally different order if we approach them from another angle—just as, in a town, buildings that appear strung irregularly along a single line, from another aspect retire into a graduated distance, and their relative heights are altered. To begin with, Albertine now struck me as not implacable so much as almost frightened; she seemed to me rather respectably than ill bred, judging by the description, "bad style," "a comic manner" which she applied to each in turn of the girls of whom I spoke to her; finally, she presented as a target for my line of sight a temple that was distinctly flushed

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

and hardly attractive to the eye, and no longer the curious gaze which I had always connected with her until then. But this was merely a second impression and there were doubtless others through which I was successively to pass. Thus it can be only after one has recognised, not without having had to feel one's way, the optical illusions of one's first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be ever possible. But it is not ; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes in himself, we think that we have caught him, he moves, and, when we imagine that at last we are seeing him clearly, it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in making clearer, when they no longer represent him.

And yet, whatever the inevitable disappointments that it must bring in its train, this movement towards what we have only half seen, what we have been free to dwell upon and imagine at our leisure, this movement is the only one that is wholesome for the senses, that whets the appetite. How dreary a monotony must pervade those people's lives who, from indolence or timidity, drive in their carriages straight to the doors of friends whom they have got to know without having first dreamed of knowing them, without ever daring, on the way, to stop and examine what arouses their desire.

I returned home, my mind full of the party, the coffee-*éclair* which I had finished eating before I let Elstir take me up to Albertine, the rose which I had given the old gentleman, all the details selected without our knowledge by the circumstances of the occasion, which compose in

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

a special and quite fortuitous order the picture that we retain of a first meeting. But this picture, I had the impression that I was seeing it from a fresh point of view, a long way remote from myself, realising that it had not existed only for me, when some months later, to my great surprise, on my speaking to Albertine on the day on which I had first met her, she reminded me of the *éclair*, the flower that I had given away, all those things which I had supposed to have been—I will not say of importance only to myself but—perceived only by myself, and which I now found thus transcribed, in a version the existence of which I had never suspected, in the mind of Albertine. On this first day itself, when, on my return to the hotel, I was able to visualise the memory which I had brought away with me, I realised the consummate adroitness with which the sleight of hand had been performed, and how I had talked for a moment or two with a person who, thanks to the skill of the conjurer, without actually embodying anything of that other person whom I had for so long been following as she paced beside the sea, had been effectively substituted for her. I might, for that matter, have guessed as much in advance, since the girl of the beach was a fabrication invented by myself. In spite of which, as I had, in my conversations with Elstir, identified her with this other girl, I felt myself in honour bound to fulfil to the real the promises of love made to the imagined Albertine. We betroth ourselves by proxy, and think ourselves obliged, in the sequel, to marry the person who has intervened. Moreover, if there had disappeared, provisionally at any rate, from my life, an anguish that found adequate consolation in the memory of polite manners, of that expression “perfectly common” and of the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

glowing temple, that memory awakened in me desire of another kind which, for all that it was placid and not at all painful, resembling rather brotherly love, might in the long run become fully as dangerous by making me feel at every moment a compelling need to kiss this new person, whose charming ways, her shyness, her unlooked-for accessibility, arrested the futile process of my imagination but gave birth to a sentimental gratitude. And then, since memory begins at once to record photographs independent of one another, eliminates every link, any kind of sequence from between the scenes portrayed in the collection which it exposes to our view, the most recent does not necessarily destroy or cancel those that came before. Confronted with the commonplace though appealing Albertine to whom I had spoken that afternoon, I still saw the other, mysterious Albertine outlined against the sea. These were now memories, that is to say pictures neither of which now seemed to me any more true than the other. But, to make an end of this first afternoon of my introduction to Albertine, when trying to recapture that little mole on her cheek, just under the eye, I remembered that, looking from Elstir's window, when Albertine had gone by, I had seen the mole on her chin. In fact, whenever I saw her I noticed that she had a mole, but my inaccurate memory made it wander about the face of Albertine, fixing it now in one place, now in another.

Whatever my disappointment in finding in Mlle. Simonet a girl so little different from those that I knew already, just as my rude awakening when I saw Balbec church did not prevent me from wishing still to go to Quimperlé, Pont-Aven and Venice, I comforted myself with the thought that through Albertine at any rate, even

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

if she herself was not all that I had hoped, I might make the acquaintance of her comrades of the little band.

I thought at first that I should fail. As she was to be staying (and I too) for a long time still at Balbec, I had decided that the best thing was not to make my efforts to meet her too apparent, but to wait for an accidental encounter. But should this occur every day, even, it was greatly to be feared that she would confine herself to acknowledging my bow from a distance, and such meetings, repeated day after day throughout the whole season, would benefit me not at all.

Shortly after this, one morning when it had been raining and was almost cold, I was accosted on the "front" by a girl wearing a close-fitting toque and carrying a muff, so different from the girl whom I had met at Elstir's party that to recognise in her the same person seemed an operation beyond the power of the human mind; mine was, nevertheless, successful in performing it, but after a momentary surprise which did not, I think, escape Albertine's notice. On the other hand, when I instinctively recalled the good breeding which had so impressed me before, she filled me with a converse astonishment by her rude tone and manners typical of the "little band". Apart from these, her temple had ceased to be the optical centre, on which the eye might comfortably rest, of her face, either because I was now on her other side, or because her toque hid it, or else possibly because its inflammation was not a constant thing. "What weather!" she began. "Really the perpetual summer of Balbec is all stuff and nonsense. You don't go in for anything special here, do you? We don't ever see you playing golf, or dancing at the Casino. You don't ride, either. You must be bored

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

stiff. You don't find it too deadly, staying about on the beach all day. I see, you just bask in the sun like a lizard ; you enjoy that. You must have plenty of time on your hands. I can see you're not like me ; I simply adore all sports. You weren't at the Sogne races ! We went in the ' tram ', and I can quite believe you don't see the fun of going in an old ' tin-pot ' like that. It took us two whole hours ! I could have gone there and back three times on my bike." I, who had been lost in admiration of Saint-Loup when he, in the most natural manner in the world, called the little local train the " crawler ", because of the ceaseless windings of its line, was positively alarmed by the glibness with which Albertine spoke of the " tram ", and called it a " tin-pot ". I could feel her mastery of a form of speech in which I was afraid of her detecting and scorning my inferiority. And yet the full wealth of the synonyms that the little band possessed to denote this railway had not yet been revealed to me. In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless, her nostrils closed, allowing only the corners of her lips to move. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial descent, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose. This enunciation which, as it happened, soon disappeared when she knew people better, giving place to a natural girlish tone, might have been thought unpleasant. But it was peculiar to herself, and delighted me. Whenever I had gone for several days without seeing her, I would refresh my spirit by repeating to myself : " We don't ever see you playing golf," with the nasal intonation in which she had uttered the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

words, point blank, without moving a muscle of her face. And I thought then that there could be no one in the world so desirable.

We formed that morning one of those couples who dotted the "front" here and there with their conjunction, their stopping together for time enough just to exchange a few words before breaking apart, each to resume separately his or her divergent stroll. I seized the opportunity, while she stood still, to look again and discover once and for all where exactly the little mole was placed. Then, just as a phrase of Vinteuil which had delighted me in the sonata, and which my recollection allowed to wander from the andante to the finale, until the day when, having the score in my hands, I was able to find it, and to fix it in my memory in its proper place, in the scherzo, so this mole, which I had visualised now on her cheek, now on her chin, came to rest for ever on her upper lip, just below her nose. In the same way, too, do we not come with amazement upon lines that we know by heart in a poem in which we never dreamed that they were to be found.

At that moment, as if in order that against the sea there might multiply in freedom, in the variety of its forms, all the rich decorative whole which was the lovely unfolding of the train of maidens, at once golden and rosy, baked by sun and wind, Albertine's friends, with their shapely limbs, their supple figures, but so different one from another, came into sight in a cluster that expanded as it approached, advancing towards us, but keeping closer to the sea, along a parallel line. I asked Albertine's permission to walk for a little way with her. Unfortunately, all she did was to wave her hand to them

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

in greeting. "But your friends will be disappointed if you don't go with them," I hinted, hoping that we might all walk together. A young man with regular features, carrying a bag of golf-clubs, sauntered up to us. It was the baccarat-player, whose fast ways so enraged the chief magistrate's wife. In a frigid, impassive tone, which he evidently regarded as an indication of the highest refinement, he bade Albertine good day. "Been playing golf, Octave?" she asked. "How did the game go? Were you in form?" "Oh, it's too sickening; I can't play for nuts," he replied. "Was Andrée playing?" "Yes, she went round in seventy-seven." "Why, that's a record!" "I went round in eighty-two yesterday." He was the son of an immensely rich manufacturer who was to take an important part in the organisation of the coming World's Fair. I was struck by the extreme degree to which, in this young man and in the other by no means numerous male friends of the band of girls, the knowledge of everything that pertained to clothes and how to wear them, cigars, English drinks, horses, a knowledge which he possessed in its minutest details with a haughty infallibility that approached the reticent modesty of the true expert, had been developed in complete isolation, unaccompanied by the least trace of any intellectual culture. He had no hesitation as to the right time and place for dinner-jacket or pyjamas, but neither had he any suspicion of the circumstances in which one might or might not employ this or that word, or even of the simplest rules of grammar. This disparity between the two forms of culture must have existed also in his father, the President of the Syndicate that "ran" Balbec, for, in an open letter to the electors which he had recently had

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

posted on all the walls, he announced : " I desired to see the Mayor, to speak to him of the matter ; he would not listen to my righteous plaint." Octave, at the Casino, took prizes in all the dancing competitions, for bostons, tangos and what-not, an accomplishment that would entitle him, if he chose, to make a fine marriage in that sea-side society where it is not figuratively but in sober earnest that the young women "marry their dancing-partners". He lighted a cigar with a "D'you mind?" to Albertine, as one who asks permission to finish, while going on talking, an urgent piece of work. For he was one of those people who can never be "doing nothing", although there was nothing, for that matter, that he could ever be said to do. And as complete inactivity has the same effect on us, in the end, as prolonged overwork, and on the character as much as on the life of body and muscles, the unimpaired nullity of intellect that was enshrined behind Octave's meditative brow had ended by giving him, despite his air of unruffled calm, ineffectual longings to think which kept him awake at night, for all the world like an overwrought philosopher.

Supposing that if I knew their male friends I should have more opportunities of seeing the girls, I had been on the point of asking for an introduction to Octave. I told Albertine this, as soon as he had left us, still muttering, "I couldn't play for nuts!" I thought I would thus put into her head the idea of doing it next time. "But I can't," she cried, "introduce you to a tame cat like that. This place simply swarms with them. But what on earth would they have to say to you? That one plays golf quite well, and that's all there is to it. I know what I'm talking about; you'd find he wasn't at all your sort."

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

"Your friends will be cross with you if you desert them like this," I repeated, hoping that she would then suggest my joining the party. "Oh, no, they don't want me." We ran into Bloch, who directed at me a subtle, insinuating smile, and, embarrassed by the presence of Albertine, whom he did not know, or, rather, knew "without knowing" her, bent his head with a stiff, almost irritated jerk. "What's he called, that Ostrogoth?" Albertine asked. "I can't think why he should bow to me; he doesn't know me. And I didn't bow to him, either." I had no time to explain to her, for, bearing straight down upon us, "Excuse me," he began, "for interrupting you, but I must tell you that I am going to Doncières to-morrow. I cannot put it off any longer without discourtesy; indeed, I ask myself, what must de Saint-Loup-en-Bray think of me. I just came to let you know that I shall take the two o'clock train. At your service." But I thought now only of seeing Albertine again, and of trying to get to know her friends, and Doncières, since they were not going there, and my going would bring me back too late to see them still on the beach, seemed to me to be situated at the other end of the world. I told Bloch that it was impossible. "Oh, very well, I shall go alone. In the fatuous words of Master Arouet, I shall say to Saint-Loup, to beguile his clericalism :

'My duty stands alone, by his in no way bound ;
Though he should choose to fail, yet faithful I'll be found.'

"

"I admit he's not a bad looking boy," was Albertine's comment, "but he makes me feel quite sick." I had never thought that Bloch might be "not a bad looking boy";

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

and yet, when one came to think of it, so he was. With his rather prominent brow, very aquiline nose, and his air of extreme cleverness and of being convinced of his cleverness, he had a pleasing face. But he could not succeed in pleasing Albertine. This was perhaps due, to some extent, to her own disadvantages, the harshness, the want of feeling of the little band, its rudeness towards everything that was not itself. And later on, when I introduced them, Albertine's antipathy for him grew no less. Bloch belonged to a section of society in which, between the free and easy customs of the "smart set" and the regard for good manners which a man is supposed to shew who "does not soil his hands", a sort of special compromise has been reached which differs from the manners of the world and is nevertheless a peculiarly unpleasant form of worldliness. When he was introduced to anyone he would bow with a sceptical smile, and at the same time with an exaggerated show of respect, and, if it was to a man, would say: "Pleased to meet you, sir," in a voice which ridiculed the words that it was uttering, though with a consciousness of belonging to some one who was no fool. Having sacrificed this first moment to a custom which he at once followed and derided (just as on the first of January he would greet you with a "Many happy!") he would adopt an air of infinite cunning, and would "proffer subtle words" which were often true enough but "got on" Albertine's nerves. When I told her on this first day that his name was Bloch, she exclaimed: "I would have betted anything he was a Jew-boy. Trust them to put their foot in it!" Moreover, Bloch was destined to give Albertine other grounds for annoyance later on. Like many intellectuals,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

he was incapable of saying a simple thing in a simple way. He would find some precious qualification for every statement, and would sweep from particular to general. It vexed Albertine, who was never too well pleased at other people's shewing an interest in what she was doing, that when she had sprained her ankle and was keeping quiet, Bloch said of her : "She is outstretched on her chair, but in her ubiquity has not ceased to frequent simultaneously vague golf-courses and dubious tennis-courts." He was simply being "literary", of course, but this, in view of the difficulties which Albertine felt that it might create for her with friends whose invitations she had declined on the plea that she was unable to move, was quite enough to disgust her with the face, the sound of the voice of the young man who could say such things about her. We parted, Albertine and I, after promising to take a walk together later. I had talked to her without being any more conscious of where my words were falling, of what became of them, than if I were dropping pebbles into a bottomless pit. That our words are, as a general rule, filled, by the person to whom we address them, with a meaning which that person derives from her own substance, a meaning widely different from that which we had put into the same words when we uttered them, is a fact which the daily round of life is perpetually demonstrating. But if we find ourself as well in the company of a person whose education (as Albertine's was to me) is inconceivable, her tastes, her reading, her principles unknown, we cannot tell whether our words have aroused in her anything that resembles their meaning, any more than in an animal, although there are things that even an animal may be made to under-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

stand. So that to attempt any closer friendship with Albertine seemed to me like placing myself in contact with the unknown, if not the impossible, an occupation as arduous as breaking a horse, as reposeful as keeping bees or growing roses.

I had thought, a few hours before, that Albertine would acknowledge my bow but would not speak to me. We had now parted, after planning to make some excursion soon together. I vowed that when I next met Albertine I would treat her with greater boldness, and I had sketched out in advance a draft of all that I would say to her, and even (being now quite convinced that she was not strait-laced) of all the favours that I would demand of her. But the mind is subject to external influences, as plants are, and cells and chemical elements, and the medium in which its immersion alters it is a change of circumstances, or new surroundings. Grown different by the mere fact of her presence, when I found myself once again in Albertine's company, what I said to her was not at all what I had meant to say. Remembering her flushed temple, I asked myself whether she might not appreciate more keenly a polite attention which she knew to be disinterested. Besides, I was embarrassed by certain things in her look, in her smile. They might equally well signify a laxity of morals and the rather silly merriment of a girl who though full of spirits was at heart thoroughly respectable. A single expression, on a face as in speech, is susceptible of divers interpretations, and I stood hesitating like a schoolboy faced by the difficulties of a piece of Greek prose.

On this occasion we met almost immediately the tall one, Andrée, the one who had jumped over the old

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

banker, and Albertine was obliged to introduce me. Her friend had a pair of eyes of extraordinary brightness, like, in a dark house, a glimpse through an open door of a room into which the sun is shining with a greenish reflexion from the glittering sea.

A party of five were passing, men whom I had come to know very well by sight during my stay at Balbec. I had often wondered who they could be. "They're nothing very wonderful," said Albertine with a sneering laugh. "The little old one with dyed hair and yellow gloves has a fine touch ; he knows how to draw all right, he's the Balbec dentist ; he's a good sort. The fat one is the Mayor, not the tiny little fat one, you must have seen him before, he's the dancing master ; he's rather a beast, you know ; he can't stand us, because we make such a row at the Casino ; we smash his chairs, and want to have the carpet up when we dance ; that's why he never gives us prizes, though we're the only girls there who can dance a bit. The dentist is a dear, I would have said how d'ye do to him, just to make the dancing master swear, but I couldn't because they've got M. de Sainte-Croix with them ; he's on the General Council ; he comes of a very good family, but he's joined the Republicans, to make more money. No nice people ever speak to him now. He knows my uncle, because they're both in the Government, but the rest of my family always cut him. The thin one in the waterproof is the bandmaster. You know him, of course. You don't ? Oh, he plays divinely. You haven't been to *Cavalleria Rusticana* ? I thought it too lovely ! He's giving a concert this evening, but we can't go because it's to be in the

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

town hall. In the Casino it wouldn't matter, but in the town hall, where they've taken down the crucifix, Andrée's mother would have a fit if we went there. You're going to say that my aunt's husband is in the Government. But what difference does that make? My aunt is my aunt. That's not why I'm fond of her. The only thing she has ever wanted has been to get rid of me. No, the person who has really been a mother to me, and all the more credit to her because she's no relation at all, is a friend of mine whom I love just as much as if she was my mother. I will let you see her 'photo'." We were joined for a moment by the golf champion and baccarat plunger, Octave. I thought that I had discovered a bond between us, for I learned in the course of conversation that he was some sort of relative, and even more a friend of the Verdurins. But he spoke contemptuously of the famous Wednesdays, adding that M. Verdurin had never even heard of a dinner-jacket, which made it a horrid bore when one ran into him in a music-hall, where one would very much rather not be greeted with "Well, you young rascal," by an old fellow in a frock coat and black tie, for all the world like a village lawyer. Octave left us, and soon it was Andrée's turn, when we came to her villa, into which she vanished without having uttered a single word to me during the whole of our walk. I regretted her departure, all the more in that, while I was complaining to Albertine how chilling her friend had been with me, and was comparing in my mind this difficulty which Albertine seemed to find in making me know her friends with the hostility that Elstir, when he might have granted my desire,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

seemed to have encountered on that first afternoon, two girls came by to whom I lifted my hat, the young Ambresacs, whom Albertine greeted also.

I felt that, in Albertine's eyes, my position would be improved by this meeting. They were the daughters of a kinswoman of Mme. de Villeparisis, who was also a friend of Mme. de Luxembourg. M. and Mme. d'Ambresac, who had a small villa at Balbec and were immensely rich, led the simplest of lives there, and always went about dressed he in an unvarying frock coat, she in a dark gown. Both of them used to make sweeping bows to my grandmother, which never led to anything further. The daughters, who were very pretty, were dressed more fashionably, but in a fashion suited rather to Paris than to the seaside. With their long skirts and large hats, they had the look of belonging to a different race from Albertine. She, I discovered, knew all about them.

"Oh, so you know the little d'Ambresacs, do you? Dear me, you have some swagger friends. After all, they're very simple souls," she went on as though this might account for it. "They're very nice, but so well brought up that they aren't allowed near the Casino, for fear of us—we've such a bad tone. They attract you, do they? Well, it all depends on what you like. They're just little white rabbits, really. There may be something in that, of course. If little white rabbits are what appeals to you, they may supply a long-felt want. It seems, there must be some attraction, because one of them has got engaged already to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Which is a cruel blow to the younger one, who is madly in love with that young man. I'm sure, the way they speak to you with their lips shut is quite enough for

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

me. And then they dress in the most absurd way. Fancy going to play golf in silk frocks ! At their age, they dress more showily than grown-up women who really know about clothes. Look at Mme. Elstir ; there's a well dressed woman if you like," I answered that she had struck me as being dressed with the utmost simplicity. Albertine laughed. " She does put on the simplest things, I admit, but she dresses wonderfully, and to get what you call simplicity costs her a fortune." Mme. Elstir's gowns passed unnoticed by any one who had not a sober and unerring taste in matters of attire. This was lacking in me. Elstir possessed it in a supreme degree, or so Albertine told me. I had not suspected this, nor that the beautiful but quite simple objects which littered his studio were treasures long desired by him which he had followed from sale room to sale room, knowing all their history, until he had made enough money to be able to acquire them. But as to this Albertine, being as ignorant as myself, could not enlighten me. Whereas when it came to clothes, prompted by a coquettish instinct, and perhaps by the regretful longing of a penniless girl who is able to appreciate with greater disinterestedness, more delicacy of feeling, in other, richer people the things that she will never be able to afford for herself, she expressed herself admirably on the refinement of Elstir's taste, so hard to satisfy that all women appeared to him badly dressed, while, attaching infinite importance to right proportions and shades of colour, he would order to be made for his wife, at fabulous prices, the sunshades, hats and cloaks which he had learned from Albertine to regard as charming, and which a person wanting in taste would no more have noticed than myself. Apart from this,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Albertine, who had done a little painting, though without, she confessed, having any "gift" for it, felt a boundless admiration for Elstir, and, thanks to his precept and example, shewed a judgment of pictures which was in marked contrast to her enthusiasm for *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The truth was, though as yet it was hardly apparent, that she was highly intelligent, and that in the things that she said the stupidity was not her own but that of her environment and age. Elstir's had been a good but only a partial influence. All the branches of her intelligence had not reached the same stage of development. The taste for pictures had almost caught up the taste for clothes and all forms of smartness, but had not been followed by the taste for music, which was still a long way behind.

Albertine might know all about the Ambresacs ; but as he who can achieve great things is not necessarily capable of small, I did not find her, after I had bowed to those young ladies, any better disposed to make me known to her friends. "It's too good of you to attach any importance to them. You shouldn't take any notice of them ; they don't count. What on earth can a lot of kids like them mean to a man like you ? Now Andrée, I must say, is remarkably clever. She is a good girl, that, though she is perfectly fantastic at times, but the others are really dreadfully stupid." When I had left Albertine, I felt suddenly a keen regret that Saint-Loup should have concealed his engagement from me and that he should be doing anything so improper as to choose a wife before breaking with his mistress. And then, shortly afterwards, I met Andrée, and as she went on talking to me for some time I seized the opportunity to tell her

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

that I would very much like to see her again next day, but she replied that this was impossible, because her mother was not at all well, and she would have to stay beside her. The next day but one, when I was at Elstir's, he told me how greatly Andrée had been attracted by me ; on my protesting : " But it was I who was attracted by her from the start ; I asked her to meet me again yesterday, but she could not." " Yes, I know ; she told me all about that," was his reply, " she was very sorry, but she had promised to go to a picnic, somewhere miles from here. They were to drive over in a break, and it was too late for her to get out of it." Albeit this falsehood (Andrée knowing me so slightly) was of no real importance, I ought not to have continued to seek the company of a person who was capable of uttering it. For what people have once done they will do again indefinitely, and if you go every year to see a friend who, the first time, was not able to meet you at the appointed place, or was in bed with a chill, you will find him in bed with another chill which he has just caught, you will miss him again at another meeting-place at which he has failed to appear, for a single and unalterable reason in place of which he supposes himself to have various reasons, drawn from the circumstances. One morning, not long after Andrée's telling me that she would be obliged to stay beside her mother, I was taking a short stroll with Albertine, whom I had found on the beach tossing up and catching again on a cord an oddly shaped implement which gave her a look of Giotto's " Idolatry " ; it was called, for that matter, " Diabolo ", and is so fallen into disuse now that, when they come upon the picture of a girl playing with one, the critics of future generations

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

will solemnly discuss, as it might be over one of the allegorical figures in the Arena, what it is that she is holding. A moment later their friend with the penurious and harsh appearance, the same one who on that first day had sneered so malevolently : "I do feel sorry for him, poor old man," when she saw the old gentlemen's head brushed by the flying feet of Andrée, came up to Albertine with "Good morning, 'm I disturbing you ?" She had taken off her hat, for comfort, and her hair, like a strange and fascinating plant, lay over her brow, displaying all the delicate tracery of its foliation. Albertine, perhaps because she resented seeing the other bare-headed, made no reply, preserved a frigid silence in spite of which the girl stayed with us, kept apart from myself by Albertine, who arranged at one moment to be alone with her, at another to walk with me leaving her to follow. I was obliged, to secure an introduction, to ask for it in the girl's hearing. Then, as Albertine was uttering my name, on the face and in the blue eyes of this girl, whose expression I had thought so cruel when I heard her say : "Poor old man, I do feel so sorry for him", I saw gather and gleam a cordial, friendly smile, and she held out her hand. Her hair was golden, and not her hair only ; for if her cheeks were pink and her eyes blue it was like the still roseate morning sky which sparkles everywhere with dazzling points of gold.

At once kindled by her flame, I said to myself that this was a child who when in love grew shy, that it was for my sake, from love for me that she had remained with us, despite Albertine's rebuffs, and that she must have rejoiced in the opportunity to confess to me at last, by that smiling, friendly gaze, that she would be as kind to me

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

as she was terrible to other people. Doubtless she had noticed me on the beach, when I still knew nothing of her, and had been thinking of me ever since ; perhaps it had been to win my admiration that she mocked at the old gentleman, and because she had not succeeded in getting to know me that on the following days she appeared so morose. From the hotel I had often seen her, in the evenings, walking by herself on the beach. Probably in the hope of meeting me. And now, hindered as much by Albertine's presence as she would have been by that of the whole band, she had evidently attached herself to us, braving the increasing coldness of her friend's attitude, only in the hope of outstaying her, of being left alone with me, when she might make an appointment with me for some time when she would find an excuse to slip away without either her family's or her friends' knowing that she had gone, and would meet me in some safe place before church or after golf. It was all the more difficult to see her because Andrée had quarrelled with her and now detested her. "I have put up far too long with her terrible dishonesty," she explained to me, "her baseness ; I can't tell you all the vile insults she has heaped on me. I have stood it all because of the others. But her latest effort was really too much !" And she told me of some foolish thing that this girl had done, which might indeed have injurious consequences to Andrée herself.

But those private words promised me by Gisèle's confiding eyes for the moment when Albertine should have left us by ourselves, were destined never to be spoken, because after Albertine, stubbornly planted between us, had answered with increasing curtness, and finally had

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

ceased to respond at all to her friend's remarks, Gisèle at length abandoned the attempt and turned back. I found fault with Albertine for having been so disagreeable. "It will teach her to be more careful how she behaves. She's not a bad kid, but she'd talk the head off a donkey. She's no business, either, to go poking her nose into everything. Why should she fasten herself on to us without being asked? In another minute I'd have told her to go to blazes. Besides I can't stand her going about with her hair like that; it's such bad form." I gazed at Albertine's cheeks as she spoke, and asked myself what might be the perfume, the taste of them: this time they were not cool, but glowed with a uniform pink, violet-tinted, creamy, like certain roses whose petals have a waxy gloss. I felt a passionate longing for them such as one feels sometimes for a particular flower. "I hadn't noticed it," was all that I said. "You stared at her hard enough; anyone would have said you wanted to paint her portrait," she scolded, not at all softened by the fact that it was at herself that I was now staring so fixedly. "I don't believe you would care for her, all the same. She's not in the least a flirt. You like little girls who flirt with you, I know. Anyhow, she won't have another chance of fastening on to us and being sent about her business; she's going off to-day to Paris." "Are the rest of your friends going too?" "No; only she and 'Miss', because she's got an exam. coming; she's got to stay at home and swot for it, poor kid. It's not much fun for her, I don't mind telling you. Of course, you may be set a good subject, you never know. But it's a tremendous risk. One girl I know was asked: *Describe an accident that you have witnessed.* That was

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

a piece of luck. But I know another girl who got : *State which you would rather have as a friend, Alceste or Philinte*. I'm sure I should have dried up altogether ! Apart from everything else, it's not a question to set to girls. Girls go about with other girls ; they're not supposed to have gentlemen friends." (This announcement, which shewed that I had but little chance of being admitted to the companionship of the band, froze my blood.) "But in any case, supposing it was set to boys, what on earth would you expect them to say to a question like that ? Several parents wrote to the *Gaulois*, to complain of the difficult questions that were being set. The joke of it is that in a collection of prize-winning essays they gave two which treated the question in absolutely opposite ways. You see, it all depends on which examiner you get. One would like you to say that Philinte was a flatterer and a scoundrel, the other that you couldn't help admiring Alceste, but that he was too cantankerous, and that as a friend you ought to choose Philinte. How can you expect a lot of unfortunate candidates to know what to say when the professors themselves can't make up their minds. But that's nothing. They get more difficult every year. Gisèle will want all her wits about her if she's to get through." I returned to the hotel. My grandmother was not there. I waited for her for some time ; when at last she appeared, I begged her to allow me, in quite unexpected circumstances, to make an expedition which might keep me away for a couple of days. I had luncheon with her, ordered a carriage and drove to the station. Gisèle would shew no surprise at seeing me there. After we had changed at Doncières, in the Paris train, there would be a carriage with a corridor,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

along which, while the governess dozed, I should be able to lead Gisèle into dark corners, and make an appointment to meet her on my return to Paris, which I would then try to put forward to the earliest possible date. I would travel with her as far as Caen or Evreux, whichever she preferred, and would take the next train back to Balbec. And yet, what would she have thought of me had she known that I had hesitated for a long time between her and her friends, that quite as much as with her I had contemplated falling in love with Albertine, with the bright-eyed girl, with Rosemonde. I felt a pang of remorse now that a bond of mutual affection was going to unite me with Gisèle. I could, moreover, truthfully have assured her that Albertine no longer interested me. I had seen her that morning as she swerved aside, almost turning her back on me, to speak to Gisèle. On her head, which was bent sullenly over her bosom, the hair that grew at the back, different from and darker even than the rest, shone as though she had just been bathing. "Like a dying duck in a thunderstorm!" I thought to myself, this view of her hair having let into Albertine's body a soul entirely different from that implied hitherto by her glowing complexion and mysterious gaze. That shining cataract of hair at the back of her head had been for a moment or two all that I was able to see of her, and continued to be all that I saw in retrospect. Our memory is like a shop in the window of which is exposed now one, now another photograph of the same person. And as a rule the most recent exhibit remains for some time the only one to be seen. While the coachman whipped on his horse I sat there listening to the words of gratitude and affection which Gisèle was murmuring in my ear, born,

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

all of them, of her friendly smile and outstretched hand, the fact being that in those periods of my life in which I was not actually, but desired to be in love, I carried in my mind not only an ideal form of beauty once seen, which I recognised at a glance in every passing stranger who kept far enough from me for her confused features to resist any attempt at identification, but also the moral phantom—ever ready to be incarnate—of the woman who was going to fall in love with me, to take up her cues in the amorous comedy which I had had written out in my mind from my earliest boyhood, and in which every nice girl seemed to me to be equally desirous of playing, provided that she had also some of the physical qualifications required. In this play, whoever the new star might be whom I invited to create or to revive the leading part, the plot, the incidents, the lines themselves preserved an unalterable form.

Within the next few days, in spite of the reluctance that Albertine had shewn from introducing me to them, I knew all the little band of that first afternoon (except Gisèle, whom, owing to a prolonged delay at the level crossing by the station and a change in the time-table, I had not succeeded in meeting on the train, which had been gone some minutes before I arrived, and to whom as it happened I never gave another thought), and two or three other girls as well to whom at my request they introduced me. And thus, my expectation of the pleasure which I should find in a new girl springing from another girl through whom I had come to know her, the latest was like one of those new varieties of rose which gardeners get by using first a rose of another kind. And as I passed from blossom to blossom along this flowery chain,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the pleasure of knowing one that was different would send me back to her to whom I was indebted for it, with a gratitude in which desire was mingled fully as much as in my new expectation. Presently I was spending all my time among these girls.

Alas ! in the freshest flower it is possible to discern those just perceptible signs which to the instructed mind indicate already what will be, by the desiccation or fructification of the flesh that is to-day in bloom, the ultimate form, immutable and already predestinate, of the autumnal seed. The eye rapturously follows a nose like a wavelet that deliciously curls the water's face at day-break and seems not to move, to be capturable by the pencil, because the sea is so calm then that one does not notice its tidal flow. Human faces seem not to change while we are looking at them, because the revolution which they perform is too slow for us to perceive it. But we have only to see, by the side of any of those girls, her mother or her aunt, to realise the distance over which, obeying the gravitation of a type that is, generally speaking, deplorable, her features will have travelled in less than thirty years, and must continue to travel until the sunset hour, until her face, having vanished altogether below the horizon, catches the light no more. I knew that, as deep, as ineluctable as is their Jewish patriotism or Christian atavism in those who imagine themselves to be the most emancipated of their race, there dwelt beneath the rosy inflorescence of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée, unknown to themselves, held in reserve until the circumstances should arise, a coarse nose, a protruding jaw, a bust that would create a sensation when it appeared, but was actually in the wings, ready to "come

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

on", just as it might be a burst of Dreyfusism, or clericalism, sudden, unforeseen, fatal, some patriotic, some feudal form of heroism emerging suddenly when the circumstances demand it from a nature anterior to that of the man himself, by means of which he thinks, lives, evolves, gains strength himself or dies, without ever being able to distinguish that nature from the successive phases which in turn he takes for it. Even mentally, we depend a great deal more than we think upon natural laws, and our mind possesses already, like some cryptogamous plant, every little peculiarity that we imagine ourselves to be selecting. For we can see only the derived ideas, without detecting the primary cause (Jewish blood, French birth or whatever it may be) that inevitably produced them, and which at a given moment we expose. And perhaps, while the former appear to us to be the result of deliberate thought, the latter that of an imprudent disregard for our own health, we take from our family, as the papilionaceae take the form of their seed, as well the ideas by which we live as the malady from which we shall die.

As on a plant whose flowers open at different seasons, I had seen, expressed in the form of old ladies, on this Balbec shore, those shrivelled seed-pods, those flabby tubers which my friends would one day be. But what matter? For the moment it was their flowering-time. And so when Mme. de Villeparisis asked me to drive with her I sought an excuse to be prevented. I never went to see Elstir unless accompanied by my new friends. I could not even spare an afternoon to go to Doncières, to pay the visit I had promised Saint-Loup. Social engagements, serious discussions, even a friendly conversa-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

tion, had they usurped the place allotted to my walks with these girls, would have had the same effect on me as if, when the luncheon bell rang, I had been taken not to a table spread with food but to turn the pages of an album. The men, the youths, the women, old or mature, whose society we suppose that we shall enjoy, are borne by us only on an unsubstantial plane surface, because we are conscious of them only by visual perception restricted to its own limits ; whereas it is as delegates from our other senses that our eyes dart towards young girls ; the senses follow, one after another, in search of the various charms, fragrant, tactile, savoury, which they thus enjoy even without the aid of fingers and lips ; and able, thanks to the art of transposition, the genius for synthesis in which desire excels, to reconstruct beneath the hue of cheeks or bosom the feel, the taste, the contact that is forbidden them, they give to these girls the same honeyed consistency as they create when they stand rifling the sweets of a rose-garden, or before a vine whose clusters their eyes alone devour.

If it rained, although the weather had no power to daunt Albertine, who was often to be seen in her waterproof spinning on her bicycle through the driving showers, we would spend the day in the Casino, where on such days, it would have seemed to me impossible not to go. I had the greatest contempt for the young Ambresacs, who had never set foot in it. And I willingly joined my friends in playing tricks on the dancing master. As a rule we had to listen to admonition from the manager, or from some of his staff, usurping dictatorial powers, because my friends, even Andrée herself, whom on that account I had regarded when I first saw her as so di-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

onysiac a creature, whereas in reality she was delicate, intellectual, and this year far from well, in spite of which her actions were controlled less by the state of her health than by the spirit of that age which overcomes every other consideration and confounds in a general gaiety the weak with the strong, could not enter the outer hall of the rooms without starting to run, jumping over all the chairs, sliding back along the floor, their balance maintained by a graceful poise of their outstretched arms, singing the while, mingling all the arts, in that first bloom of youth, in the manner of those poets of ancient days for whom the different "kinds" were not yet separate, so that in an epic poem they would introduce rules of agriculture with theological doctrine.

This Andrée who had struck me when I first saw them as the coldest of them all, was infinitely more refined, more loving, more sensitive than Albertine, to whom she displayed the caressing, gentle affection of an elder sister. At the Casino she would come across the floor to sit down by me, and knew instinctively, unlike Albertine, to refuse my invitation to dance, or even, if I was tired, to give up the Casino and come to me instead at the hotel. She expressed her friendship for me, for Albertine, in terms which were evidence of the most exquisite understanding of the things of the heart, which may have been partly due to the state of her health. She had always a merry smile of excuse for the childish behaviour of Albertine, who expressed with a crude violence the irresistible temptation held out to her by the parties and picnics to which she had not the sense, like Andrée, resolutely to prefer staying and talking with me. When the time came for her to go off to a luncheon party at the

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

golf-club, if we were all three together she would get ready to leave us, then, coming up to Andrée : "Well, Andrée, what are you waiting for now ? You know we are lunching at the golf-club." "No ; I'm going to stay and talk to him," replied Andrée, pointing to me. "But you know, Mme. Durieux invited you," cried Albertine, as if Andrée's intention to remain with me could be explained only by ignorance on her part where else and by whom she had been bidden. "Look here, my good girl, don't be such an idiot," Andrée chid her. Albertine did not insist, fearing a suggestion that she too should stay with me. She tossed her head : "Just as you like," was her answer, uttered in the tone one uses to an invalid whose self-indulgence is killing him by inches, "I must fly ; I'm sure your watch is slow," and off she went. "She is a dear girl, but quite impossible," said Andrée, bathing her friend in a smile at once caressing and critical. If in this craze for amusement Albertine might be said to echo something of the old original Gilberte, that is because a certain similarity exists, although the type evolves, between all the women we love, a similarity that is due to the fixity of our own temperament, which it is that chooses them, eliminating all those who would not be at once our opposite and our complement, fitted that is to say to gratify our senses and to wring our heart. They are, these women, a product of our temperament, an image inversely projected, a negative of our sensibility. So that a novelist might, in relating the life of his hero, describe his successive love-affairs in almost exactly similar terms, and thereby give the impression not that he was repeating himself but that he was creating, since an artificial novelty is never so effective as a

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

repetition that manages to suggest a fresh truth. He ought, moreover, to indicate in the character of the lover a variability which becomes apparent as the story moves into fresh regions, into different latitudes of life. And perhaps he would be stating yet another truth if while investing all the other persons of his story with distinct characters he refrained from giving any to the beloved. We understand the characters of people who do not interest us ; how can we ever grasp that of a person who is an intimate part of our existence, whom after a little we no longer distinguish in any way from ourself, whose motives provide us with an inexhaustible supply of anxious hypotheses which we perpetually reconstruct. Springing from somewhere beyond our understanding, our curiosity as to the woman whom we love overleaps the bounds of that woman's character, which we might if we chose but probably will not choose to stop and examine. The object of our uneasy investigation is something more essential than those details of character comparable to the tiny particles of epidermis whose varied combinations form the florid originality of human flesh. Our intuitive radiography pierces them, and the images which it photographs for us, so far from being those of any single face, present rather the joyless universality of a skeleton.

Andrée, being herself extremely rich while the other was penniless and an orphan, with real generosity lavished on Albertine the full benefit of her wealth. As for her feelings towards Gisèle, they were not quite what I had been led to suppose. News soon reached us of the young student, and when Albertine handed round the letter she had received, a letter intended by Gisèle to give

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

an account of her journey and to report her safe arrival to the little band, pleading laziness as an excuse for not having written yet to the rest, I was surprised to hear Andrée (for I imagined an irreparable breach between them) say : "I shall write to her to-morrow, because if I wait for her to write I may have to wait for years, she's such a slacker." And, turning to myself, she added : "You saw nothing much in her, evidently ; but she's a jolly nice girl, and besides I'm really very fond of her." From which I concluded that Andrée's quarrels were apt not to last very long.

Except on these rainy days, as we had always arranged to go on our bicycles along the cliffs, or on an excursion inland, an hour or so before it was time to start I would go upstairs to make myself smart and would complain if Françoise had not laid out all the things that I wanted. Now even in Paris she would proudly, angrily straighten a back which the years had begun to bend, at the first word of reproach, she so humble, she so modest and charming when her self-esteem was flattered. As this was the mainspring of her life, her satisfaction, her good humour were in direct ratio to the difficulty of the tasks imposed on her. Those which she had to perform at Balbec were so easy that she shewed almost all the time a discontent which was suddenly multiplied an hundred-fold, with the addition of an ironic air of offended dignity when I complained, on my way down to join my friends, that my hat had not been brushed or my ties sorted. She who was capable of taking such endless pains, without in consequence assuming that she had done anything at all, on my simply remarking that a coat was not in its proper place, not only did she boast of the care with

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

which she had "put it past sooner than let it go gathering the dust," but, paying a formal tribute to her own labours, lamented that it was little enough of a holiday that she was getting at Balbec, and that we would not find another person in the whole world who would consent to put up with such treatment. "I can't think how anyone can leave things lying about the way you do ; you just try and get anyone else to find what you want in such a mix-up. The devil himself would give it up, as a bad job." Or else she would adopt a regal mien, scorching me with her fiery glance, and preserve a silence that was broken as soon as she had fastened the door behind her and was outside in the passage, which would then reverberate with utterances which I guessed to be insulting, though they remained as indistinct as those of characters in a play whose opening lines are spoken in the wings, before they appear on the stage. And even if nothing was missing and Françoise was in a good temper, still she made herself quite intolerable when I was getting ready to go out with my friends. For, drawing upon a store of stale witticisms at their expense which, in my need to be talking about the girls, I had made in her hearing, she put on an air of being about to reveal to me things of which I should have known more than she had there been any truth in her statements, which there never was, Françoise having misunderstood what she had heard. She had, like most people, her own ways ; a person is never like a straight highway, but surprises us with the strange, unavoidable windings of his course through life, by which, though some people may not notice them, we find it a perpetual annoyance to be stopped and hindered. Whenever I arrived at the stage

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

of "Where is my hat?" or uttered the name of *Andrée* or *Albertine*, I was forced by *Françoise* to stray into endless and absurd side-tracks which greatly delayed my progress. So too when I asked her to cut me the sandwiches of cheese or salad, or sent her out for the cakes which I was to eat while we rested on the cliffs, sharing them with the girls, and which the girls "might very well have taken turns to provide, if they had not been so close," declared *Françoise*, to whose aid there came at such moments a whole heritage of atavistic peasant rapacity and coarseness, and for whom one would have said that the soul of her late enemy *Eulalie* had been broken into fragments and reincarnate, more attractively than it had ever been in *Saint-Eloi's*, in the charming bodies of my friends of the little band. I listened to these accusations with a dull fury at finding myself brought to a standstill at one of those places beyond which the well-trodden country path that was *Françoise's* character became impassable, though fortunately never for very long. Then, my hat or coat found and the sandwiches ready, I sallied out to find *Albertine*, *Andrée*, *Rosemonde*, and any others there might be, and on foot or on our bicycles we would start.

In the old days I should have preferred our excursion to be made in bad weather. For then I still looked to find in *Balbec* the "Cimmerians' land", and fine days were a thing that had no right to exist there, an intrusion of the vulgar summer of seaside holiday-makers into that ancient region swathed in eternal mist. But now, everything that I had hitherto despised, shut out of my field of vision, not only effects of sunlight upon sea and shore, but even the regattas, the race-meetings, I would have

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

sought out with ardour, for the reason for which formerly I had wanted only stormy seas, which was that these were now associated in my mind, as the others had been, with an aesthetic idea. Because I had gone several times with my new friends to visit Elstir, and, on the days when the girls were there, what he had selected to shew us were drawings of pretty women in yachting dress, or else a sketch made on a race-course near Balbec. I had at first shyly admitted to Elstir that I had not felt inclined to go to the meetings that were being held there. "You were wrong," he told me, "it is such a pretty sight, and so well worth seeing. For one thing, that peculiar animal, the jockey, on whom so many eager eyes are fastened, who in the paddock there looks so grim, a colourless face between his brilliant jacket and cap, one body and soul with the prancing horse he rides, how interesting to analyse his professional movements, the bright splash of colour he makes, with the horse's coat blending in it, as they stream down the course. What a transformation of every visible object in that luminous vastness of a racecourse where one is constantly surprised by fresh lights and shades which one sees only there. How charming the women can look there, too ! The first day's racing was quite delightful, and there were women there exquisitely dressed, in the misty light of a Dutch landscape, in which one could feel rising to cloud the sun itself the penetrating coldness of the water. Never have I seen women arriving in carriages, or standing with glasses to their eyes in so extraordinary a light, which was due, I suppose, to the moisture from the sea. I should simply have loved to paint it. I came home from the races quite mad, and so keen to get to work !" After

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

which he became more enthusiastic still over the yacht-races, and I realised that regattas, social fixtures where well-dressed women might be seen bathed in the greenish light of a marine race-course, might be for a modern artist as interesting a subject as were the revels which they so loved to depict for a Veronese or Carpaccio. When I suggested this to Elstir, "Your comparison is all the more true," he replied, "since, from the position of the city in which they painted, those revels were to a great extent aquatic. Except that the beauty of the shipping in those days lay as a rule in its solidity, in the complication of its structure. They had water-tournaments, as we have here, held generally in honour of some Embassy, such as Carpaccio shews us in his *Legend of Saint Ursula*. The vessels were massive, built up like architecture, and seemed almost amphibious, like lesser Venices set in the heart of the greater, when, moored to the banks by hanging stages decked with crimson satin and Persian carpets, they bore their freight of ladies in cherry-red brocade and green damask close under the balconies incrustated with many-coloured marbles from which other ladies leaned to gaze at them, in gowns with black sleeves slashed with white, stitched with pearls or bordered with lace. You cannot tell where the land ends and the water begins, what is still the palace or already the vessel, the caravel, the galeas, the Bucintoro." Albertine had listened with the keenest interest to these details of costume, these visions of elegance that Elstir was describing to us. "Oh, I should so like to see that lace you speak of; it's so pretty, the Venice-point," she cried, "Besides, I should love to see Venice." "You may, perhaps, before very long, be able," Elstir informed

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

her, "to gaze upon the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. Hitherto one has seen them only in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of old churches, except now and then when a specimen has come into the sale-room. But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has recovered the secret of the craft, and that before many years have passed women will be able to walk abroad, and better still to sit at home in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned, for her patrician daughters, with patterns brought from the Orient. But I don't know that I should much care for that, that it wouldn't be too much of an anachronism for the women of to-day, even when they parade at regattas, for, to return to our modern pleasure-craft, the times have completely changed since 'Venice, Queen of the Adriatic'. The great charm of a yacht, of the furnishings of a yacht, of yachting dress, is their simplicity, as just things for the sea, and I do so love the sea. I must confess to you that I prefer the fashions of to-day to those of Veronese's and even of Carpaccio's time. What there is so attractive about our yachts—and the smaller yachts especially, I don't like the huge ones, they're too much like ships; yachts are like women's hats, you must keep within certain limits—is the unbroken surface, simple, gleaming, grey, which under a cloudy, leaden sky takes on a creamy softness. The cabin in which we live ought to make us think of a little café. And women's clothes on board a yacht are the same sort of thing; what really are charming are those light garments, uniformly white, of cloth or linen or nankeen or drill, which in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea shew up with as dazzling a whiteness as

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

which he became more enthusiastic still over the yacht-races, and I realised that regattas, social fixtures where well-dressed women might be seen bathed in the greenish light of a marine race-course, might be for a modern artist as interesting a subject as were the revels which they so loved to depict for a Veronese or Carpaccio. When I suggested this to Elstir, "Your comparison is all the more true," he replied, "since, from the position of the city in which they painted, those revels were to a great extent aquatic. Except that the beauty of the shipping in those days lay as a rule in its solidity, in the complication of its structure. They had water-tournaments, as we have here, held generally in honour of some Embassy, such as Carpaccio shews us in his *Legend of Saint Ursula*. The vessels were massive, built up like architecture, and seemed almost amphibious, like lesser Venices set in the heart of the greater, when, moored to the banks by hanging stages decked with crimson satin and Persian carpets, they bore their freight of ladies in cherry-red brocade and green damask close under the balconies incrustated with many-coloured marbles from which other ladies leaned to gaze at them, in gowns with black sleeves slashed with white, stitched with pearls or bordered with lace. You cannot tell where the land ends and the water begins, what is still the palace or already the vessel, the caravel, the galeas, the Bucintoro." Albertine had listened with the keenest interest to these details of costume, these visions of elegance that Elstir was describing to us. "Oh, I should so like to see that lace you speak of ; it's so pretty, the Venice-point," she cried, "Besides, I should love to see Venice." "You may, perhaps, before very long, be able," Elstir informed

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

her, "to gaze upon the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. Hitherto one has seen them only in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of old churches, except now and then when a specimen has come into the sale-room. But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has recovered the secret of the craft, and that before many years have passed women will be able to walk abroad, and better still to sit at home in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned, for her patrician daughters, with patterns brought from the Orient. But I don't know that I should much care for that, that it wouldn't be too much of an anachronism for the women of to-day, even when they parade at regattas, for, to return to our modern pleasure-craft, the times have completely changed since 'Venice, Queen of the Adriatic'. The great charm of a yacht, of the furnishings of a yacht, of yachting dress, is their simplicity, as just things for the sea, and I do so love the sea. I must confess to you that I prefer the fashions of to-day to those of Veronese's and even of Carpaccio's time. What there is so attractive about our yachts—and the smaller yachts especially, I don't like the huge ones, they're too much like ships; yachts are like women's hats, you must keep within certain limits—is the unbroken surface, simple, gleaming, grey, which under a cloudy, leaden sky takes on a creamy softness. The cabin in which we live ought to make us think of a little café. And women's clothes on board a yacht are the same sort of thing; what really are charming are those light garments, uniformly white, of cloth or linen or nankeen or drill, which in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea shew up with as dazzling a whiteness as

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

a spread sail. You very seldom see a woman, for that matter, who knows how to dress, and yet some of them are quite wonderful. At the races, Mlle. Léa had a little white hat and a little white sunshade, simply enchanting. I don't know what I wouldn't give for that little sunshade." I should have liked very much to know in what respect this little sunshade differed from any other, and for other reasons, reasons of feminine vanity. Albertine was still more curious. But, just as Françoise used to explain the excellence of her *soufflés* by "It's the way you do them," so here the difference lay in the cut. "It was," Elstir explained, "quite tiny, quite round, like a Chinese umbrella," I mentioned the sunshades carried by various ladies, but it was not like any of them. Elstir found them all quite hideous. A man of exquisite taste, singularly hard to please, he would isolate some minute detail which was the whole difference between what was worn by three-quarters of the women he saw, and horrified him, and a thing which enchanted him by its prettiness; and—in contrast to its effect on myself, whose mind any display of luxury at once sterilised—stimulated his desire to paint "so as to make something as attractive." "Here you see a young lady who has guessed what the hat and sunshade were like," he said to me, pointing to Albertine whose eyes shone with envy. "How I should love to be rich, to have a yacht!" she said to the painter. "I should come to you to tell me how to run it. What lovely trips I'd take. And what fun it would be to go to Cowes for the races. And a motor-car! Tell me, do you think the ladies' fashions for motoring pretty?" "No;" replied Elstir, "but that will come in time. You see, there are very few

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

firms at present, one or two only, Callot—although they go in rather too freely for lace—Doucet, Cheruit, Paquin sometimes. The others are all horrible.” “Then, is there a vast difference between a Callot dress and one from any ordinary shop?” I asked Albertine. “Why, an enormous difference, my little man! I beg your pardon! Only, alas! what you get for three hundred francs in an ordinary shop will cost two thousand there. But there can be no comparison; they look the same only to people who know nothing at all about it.” “Quite so,” put in Elstir; “though I should not go so far as to say that it is as profound as the difference between a statue from Rheims Cathedral and one from Saint-Augustin. By the way, talking of cathedrals,” he went on, addressing himself exclusively to me, because what he was saying had reference to an earlier conversation in which the girls had not taken part, and which for that matter would not have interested them at all, “I spoke to you the other day of Balbec church as a great cliff, a huge breakwater built of the stone of the country; now look at this;” he handed me a water-colour. “Look at these cliffs (it’s a sketch I did close to here, at the Creuniers); don’t these rocks remind you of a cathedral?” And indeed one would have taken them for soaring red arches. But, painted on a roasting hot day, they seemed to have crumbled into dust, made volatile by the heat which had drunk up half the sea, distilled over the whole surface of the picture almost into a gaseous state. On this day on which the sunlight had, so to speak, destroyed reality, reality concentrated itself in certain dusky and transparent creatures which, by contrast, gave a more striking, a closer impression of life :

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the shadows. Ravening after coolness, most of them, deserting the scorched open spaces, had fled for shelter to the foot of the rocks, out of reach of the sun ; others, swimming gently upon the tide, like dolphins, kept close under the sides of the moving vessels, whose hulls they extended upon the pale surface of the water with their glossy blue forms. It was perhaps the thirst for coolness which they conveyed that did most to give me the sensation of the heat of this day and made me exclaim how much I regretted not knowing the Creuniers. Albertine and Andrée were positive that I must have been there hundreds of times. If so I had been there without knowing it, never suspecting that one day the sight of these rocks was to inspire me with such a thirst for beauty, not perhaps exactly natural beauty such as I had been seeking hitherto among the cliffs of Balbec, but rather architectural. Above all, I who, having come here to visit the kingdom of the storm, had never found, on any of my drives with Mme. de Villeparisis, when often we saw it only from afar, painted in a gap between the trees, the ocean sufficiently real, sufficiently liquid, giving a sufficient impression that it was hurling its massed forces against the shore, and would have liked to see it lie motionless only under a wintry shroud of fog, I could never have believed that I should now be dreaming of a sea which was nothing more than a whitish vapour that had lost both consistency and colour. But of such a sea Elstir, like the people who sat musing on board those vessels drowsy with the heat, had so intensely felt the enchantment that he had succeeded in transcribing, in fixing for all time upon the painted sheet the imperceptible reflux of the tide, the throb of one happy moment ; and one

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

suddenly became so enamoured, at the sight of this magic portrait, that one could think of nothing else than to range the world over, seeking to recapture the vanished day in its instantaneous, slumbering beauty.

So that if before these visits to Elstir, before I had set eyes on one of his sea-pictures in which a young woman in a dress of white serge or linen, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, had duplicated a white linen dress and coloured flag in my imagination which at once bred in me an insatiable desire to visit the spot and see there with my own eyes white linen dresses and flags against the sea, as though no such experience had ever yet befallen me, always until then I had taken care when I stood by the sea to expel from my field of vision, as well as the bathers in the foreground, the yachts with their too dazzling sails that were like seaside costumes, everything that prevented me from persuading myself that I was contemplating the immemorial flood of ocean which had been moving with the same mysterious life before the appearance of the human race; and had grudged even the days of radiant sunshine which seemed to me to invest with the trivial aspect of the world's universal summer this coast of fog and tempest, to mark simply an interruption, equivalent to what in music is known as a rest; now on the other hand it was the bad days that appeared to me to be some disastrous accident, a thing that could no longer find any place for itself in the world of beauty; I felt a keen desire to go out and recapture in reality what had so powerfully aroused my imagination, and I hoped that the weather would be propitious enough for me to see from the summit of the cliff the same blue shadows as were in Elstir's picture.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Nor, as I went along, did I still make a frame about my eyes with my hands as in the days when, conceiving nature to be animated by a life anterior to the first appearance of man, and inconsistent with all those wearisome perfections of industrial achievement which had hitherto made me yawn with boredom at Universal Exhibitions or in the milliners' windows, I endeavoured to include only that section of the sea over which there was no steamer passing, so that I might picture it to myself as immemorial, still contemporary with the ages in which it had been set apart from the land, or at least with the first dawn of life in Greece, which enabled me to repeat in their literal meaning the lines of "Father Leconte" of which Bloch was so fond:

'Gone are the Kings, gone are their towering prows,
Vanished upon the raging deep, alas,
The long-haired warrior heroes of Hellas.'

I could no longer despise the milliners, now that Elstir had told me that the delicate touches by which they give a last refinement, a supreme caress to the ribbons or feathers of a hat after it is finished would be as interesting to him to paint as the muscular action of the jockeys themselves (a statement which had delighted Albertine). But I must wait until I had returned—for milliners, to Paris—for regattas and races to Balbec, where there would be no more now until next year. Even a yacht with women in white linen garments was not to be found.

Often we encountered Bloch's sisters, to whom I was obliged to bow since I had dined with their father. My new friends did not know them. "I am not allowed to play with Israelites," Albertine explained. Her way of

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

pronouncing the word—"Issraelites" instead of "Izraelites"—would in itself have sufficed to show, even if one had not heard the rest of the sentence, that it was no feeling of friendliness towards the chosen race that inspired these young Frenchwomen, brought up in God-fearing homes, and quite ready to believe that the Jews were in the habit of massacring Christian children. "Besides, they're shocking bad form, your friends," said Andrée with a smile which implied that she knew very well that they were no friends of mine. "Like everything to do with the tribe," went on Albertine, in the sententious tone of one who spoke from personal experience. To tell the truth, Bloch's sisters, at once overdressed and half naked, with their languishing, bold, blatant, sluttish air did not create the best impression. And one of their cousins, who was only fifteen, scandalised the Casino by her unconcealed admiration for Mlle. Léa, whose talent as an actress M. Bloch senior rated very high, but whose tastes were understood to lead her not exactly in the direction of the gentlemen.

Some days we took our refreshment at one of the outlying farms which catered for visitors. These were the farms known as Les Ecorres, Marie-Thérèse, La Croix d'Heuland, Bagatelle, Californie and Marie-Antoinette. It was the last that had been adopted by the little band.

But at other times, instead of going to a farm, we would climb to the highest point of the cliff, and, when we had reached it and were seated on the grass, would undo our parcel of sandwiches and cakes. My friends preferred the sandwiches, and were surprised to see me eat only a single chocolate cake, sugared with gothic tracery, or an apricot tart. This was because, with the sand-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

wiches of cheese or of green-stuff, a form of food that was novel to me and knew nothing of the past, I had nothing in common. But the cakes understood, the tarts were gossips. There were in the former an insipid taste of cream, in the latter a fresh taste of fruit which knew all about Combray, and about Gilberte, not only the Gilberte of Combray but her too of Paris, at whose tea-parties I had found them again. They reminded me of those cake-plates of the Arabian Nights pattern, the subjects on which were such a distraction to my aunt Léonie when Françoise brought her up, one day, Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp, another day Ali-Baba, or the Sleeper Awakes or Sinbad the Sailor embarking at Bassorah with all his treasure. I should dearly have liked to see them again, but my grandmother did not know what had become of them, and thought moreover that they were just common plates that had been bought in the village. No matter, in that grey, midland Combray scene they and their pictures were set like many-coloured jewels, as in the dark church were the windows with their shifting radiance, as in the dusk of my bedroom were the projections cast by the magic-lantern, as in the foreground of the view of the railway-station and the little local line the buttercups from the Indies and the Persian lilacs, as were my great-aunt's shelves of old porcelain in the sombre dwelling of an elderly lady in a country town.

Stretched out on the cliff I would see before me nothing but grassy meadows and beyond them not the seven heavens of the Christian cōsmogony but two stages only, one of a deeper blue, the sea, and over it another more pale. We ate our food, and if I had brought with me also some little keepsake which might appeal to one or

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

other of my friends, joy sprang with such sudden violence into her translucent face, flushed in an instant, that her lips had not the strength to hold it in, and to allow it to escape parted in a shout of laughter. They had gathered close round me, and between their faces which were almost touching one another the air that separated them traced azure pathways such as might have been cut by a gardener wishing to clear the ground a little so as to be able himself to move freely through a thicket of roses.

When we had finished eating we would play games which until then I should have thought boring, sometimes such childish games as King of the Castle, or Who Laughs First ; not for a kingdom would I have renounced them now ; the rosy dawn of adolescence, with which the faces of these girls were still aglow, and from which I, young as I was, had already emerged, shed its light on everything round about them and, like the fluid painting of some of the Primitives, brought out the most insignificant details of their daily lives in relief against a golden background. Even the faces of the girls were, for the most part, clouded with this misty effulgence of a dawn from which their actual features had not yet emerged. One saw only a charming sheet of colour beneath which what in a few years' time would be a profile was not discernible. The profile of to-day had nothing definite about it, and could be only a momentary resemblance to some deceased member of the family to whom nature had paid this commemorative courtesy. It comes so soon, the moment when there is nothing left to wait for, when the body is fixed in an immobility which holds no fresh surprise in store, when one loses all hope

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

on seeing—as on a tree in the height of summer leaves already brown—round a face still young hair that is growing thin or turning grey ; it is so short, that radiant morning time that one comes to like only the very youngest girls, those in whom the flesh, like a precious leaven, is still at work. They are no more yet than a stream of ductile matter, moulded ever afresh by the fleeting impression of the moment. You would say that each of them was in turn a little statuette of childish gaiety, of a child grown earnest, coaxing, surprised, taking its pattern from an expression frank and complete, but fugitive. This plasticity gives a wealth of variety and charm to the pretty attentions which a little girl pays to us. Of course, such attentions are indispensable in the woman also, and she whom we do not attract, or who fails to let us see that we have attracted her, tends to assume in our eyes a somewhat tedious uniformity. But even these pretty attentions, after a certain age, cease to send gentle ripples over a face which the struggle for existence has hardened, has rendered unalterably militant or ecstatic. One—owing to the prolonged strain of the obedience that subjects wife to husband—will seem not so much a woman's face as a soldier's ; another, carved by the sacrifices which a mother has consented to make, day after day, for her children, will be the face of an apostle. A third is, after a stormy passage through the years, the face of an ancient mariner, upon a body of which its garments alone indicate the sex. Certainly the attentions that a woman pays us can still, so long as we are in love with her, scatter fresh charms over the hours that we spend in her company. But she is not then for us a series of different women. Her gaiety remains external

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

to an unchanging face. Whereas adolescence is anterior to this complete solidification ; and from this it follows that we feel, in the company of young girls, the refreshing sense that is afforded us by the spectacle of forms undergoing an incessant process of change, a play of unstable forces which makes us think of that perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature which we contemplate when we stand by the sea.

It was not merely a social engagement, a drive with Mme. de Villeparisis, that I would have sacrificed to the "Ferret" or "Guessing Games" of my friends. More than once, Robert de Saint-Loup had sent word that, since I was not coming to see him at Doncières, he had applied for twenty-four hours' leave, which he would spend at Balbec. Each time I wrote back that he was on no account to come, offering the excuse that I should be obliged to be away myself that very day, when I had some duty call to pay with my grandmother on family friends in the neighbourhood. No doubt I fell in his estimation when he learned from his aunt in what the "duty call" consisted, and who the persons were who combined to play the part of my grandmother. And yet I had not been wrong, perhaps, after all, in sacrificing not only the vain pleasures of the world but the real pleasure of friendship to that of spending the whole day in this green garden. People who enjoy the capacity—it is true that such people are artists, and I had long been convinced that I should never be that—are also under an obligation to live for themselves. And friendship is a dispensation from this duty, an abdication of self. Even conversation, which is the mode of expression of friendship, is a superficial digres-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

sion which gives us no new acquisition. We may talk for a lifetime without doing more than indefinitely repeat the vacuity of a minute, whereas the march of thought in the solitary travail of artistic creation proceeds downwards, into the depths, in the only direction that is not closed to us, along which we are free to advance—though with more effort, it is true—towards a goal of truth. And friendship is not merely devoid of virtue, like conversation, it is fatal to us as well. For the sense of boredom which it is impossible not to feel in a friend's company (when, that is to say, we must remain exposed on the surface of our consciousness, instead of pursuing our voyage of discovery into the depths) for those of us in whom the law of development is purely internal—that first impression of boredom our friendship impels us to correct when we are alone again, to recall with emotion the words uttered by our friend, to look upon them as a valuable addition to our substance, albeit we are not like buildings to which stones can be added from without, but like trees which draw from their own sap the knot that duly appears on their trunks, the spreading roof of their foliage. I was lying to myself, I was interrupting the process of growth in that direction in which I could indeed really be enlarged and made happy, when I congratulated myself on being liked, admired, by so good, so clever, so rare a creature as Saint-Loup, when I focussed my mind, not upon my own obscure impressions which duty bade me unravel, but on the words uttered by my friend, in which, when I repeated them to myself—when I had them repeated to me by that other self who dwells in us and on to whom we are always so ready to transfer the burden of taking thought,—I

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

strove to make myself find a beauty very different from that which I used to pursue in silence when I was really alone, but one that would enhance the merit of Robert, of myself, of my life. In the life which a friend like this provided for me, I seemed to myself to be comfortably preserved from solitude, nobly desirous of sacrificing myself for him, in fact quite incapable of realising myself. Among the girls, on the other hand, if the pleasure which I enjoyed was selfish, at least it was not based on the lie which seeks to make us believe that we are not irremediably alone, and which, when we talk to another person, prevents us from admitting that it is no longer we who speak, that we are fashioning ourself in the likeness of strangers and not of our own ego, which is quite different from them. The words that passed between the girls of the little band and myself were not of any interest ; they were, moreover, but few, broken by long spells of silence on my part. All of which did not prevent me from finding, in listening to them when they spoke to me, as much pleasure as in gazing at them, in discovering in the voice of each one of them a brightly coloured picture. It was with ecstasy that I caught their pipings. Love helps us to discern things, to discriminate. Standing in a wood, the lover of birds at once distinguishes the notes of the different species, which to ordinary people sound the same. The lover of girls knows that human voices vary even more. Each one possesses more notes than the richest instrument of music. And the combinations in which the voice groups those notes are as inexhaustible as the infinite variety of personalities. When I talked with any one of my friends I was conscious that the original, the unique portrait of her individuality had been

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

skilfully traced, tyrannically imposed on my mind as much by the inflexions of her voice as by those of her face, and that these were two separate spectacles which rendered, each in its own plane, the same single reality. No doubt the lines of the voice, like those of the face, were not yet definitely fixed; the voice had still to break, as the face to change. Just as children have a gland the secretion in which enables them to digest milk, a gland which is not found in grown men and women, so there were in the twitterings of these girls notes which women's voices no longer contain. And on this instrument with its greater compass they played with their lips, shewing all the application, the ardour of Bellini's little angel musicians, qualities which also are an exclusive appanage of youth. Later on these girls would lose that note of enthusiastic conviction which gave a charm to their simplest utterances, whether it were Albertine who, in a tone of authority, repeated puns to which the younger ones listened with admiration, until that wild impulse to laugh caught them all with the irresistible violence of a sneeze, or Andrée who began to speak of their work in the schoolroom, work even more childish seemingly than the games they played, with a gravity essentially puerile; and their words changed in tone, like the lyrics of ancient times when poetry, still hardly differentiated from music, was declaimed upon the different notes of a scale. In spite of which, the girls' voices already gave a quite clear indication of the attitude that each of these little people had adopted towards life, an attitude so personal that it would be speaking in far too general terms to say of one: "She treats everything as a joke," of another: "She jumps from assertion to assertion," of a third: "She

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

lives in a state of expectant hesitation." The features of our face are hardly more than gestures which force of habit has made permanent. Nature, like the destruction of Pompeii, like the metamorphosis of a nymph into a tree, has arrested us in an accustomed movement. Similarly, our intonations embody our philosophy of life, what a person says to himself about things at any given moment. No doubt these peculiarities were to be found not only in the girls. They were those of their parents. The individual is a part of something that is more generally diffused than himself. By this reckoning, our parents furnish us not only with those habitual gestures which are the outlines of our face and voice, but also with certain mannerisms in speech, certain favourite expressions, which, almost as unconscious as an intonation, almost as profound, indicate likewise a definite point of view towards life. It is quite true, since we are speaking of girls, that there are certain of these expressions which their parents do not hand on to them until they have reached a certain age, as a rule not before they are women. These are kept in reserve. Thus, for instance, if you were to speak of the pictures of one of Elstir's friends, Andrée, whose hair was still "down", could not yet make use, personally, of the expression which her mother and elder sister employed: "It appears, the man is quite charming!" But that would come in due course, when she was allowed to go to the Palais-Royal. And already, since her first communion, Albertine had begun to say, like a friend of her aunt: "I'm sure I should find that simply terrible!" She had also had given to her, as a little present, the habit of repeating whatever you had just been saying to her, so as to ap-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

pear to be interested, and to be trying to form an opinion of her own. If you said that an artist's work was good, or his house nice, "Oh, his work is good, is it?" "Oh, his house is nice, is it?" Last of all, and even more general than the family heritage, was the rich layer imposed by the native province from which they derived their voices and of which indeed their intonations smacked. When Andrée sharply struck a solemn note she could not prevent the Perigordian string of her vocal instrument from giving back a resonant sound quite in harmony, moreover, with the Meridional purity of her features; while to the incessant pranks of Rosemonde the substance of her North-Country face and voice responded, whatever her mood at the time, in the accent of their province. Between that province and the temperament of the little girl who dictated these inflexions, I caught a charming dialogue. A dialogue, not in any sense a discord. It would not have been possible to separate the girl herself and her native place. She was herself; she was still it also. Moreover this reaction of locally procured materials on the genius who utilises them and to whose work their reaction imparts an added freshness, does not make the work any less individual, and whether it be that of an architect, a cabinet-maker or a composer, it reflects no less minutely the most subtle shades of the artist's personality, because he has been compelled to work in the millstone of Senlis or the red sandstone of Strasbourg, has respected the knots peculiar to the ash-tree, has borne in mind, when writing his score, the resources, the limitations, the volume of sound, the possibilities of flute or alto voice.

All this I realised, and yet we talked so little. Whereas

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

with Mme. de Villeparisis or Saint-Loup I should have displayed by my words a great deal more pleasure than I should actually have felt, for I used always to be worn out when I parted from them; when, on the other hand, I was lying on the grass among all these girls, the plentitude of what I was feeling infinitely outweighed the paucity, the infrequency of our speech, and brimmed over from my immobility and silence in floods of happiness, the waves of which rippled up to die at the feet of these young roses.

For a convalescent who rests all day long in a flower-garden or orchard, a scent of flowers or fruit does not more completely pervade the thousand trifles that compose his idle hours than did for me that colour, that fragrance in search of which my eyes kept straying towards the girls, and the sweetness of which finally became incorporated in me. So it is that grapes grow sugary in sunshine. And by their slow continuity these simple little games had gradually wrought in me also, as in those who do nothing else all day but lie outstretched by the sea, breathing the salt air and growing sun-burned, a relaxation, a blissful smile, a vague sense of dizziness that had spread from brain to eyes.

Now and then a pretty attention from one or another of them would stir in me vibrations which dissipated for a time my desire for the rest. Thus one day Albertine had suddenly asked: "Who has a pencil?" Andrée had provided one, Rosemonde the paper; Albertine had warned them: "Now, young ladies, you are not to look at what I write." After carefully tracing each letter, supporting the paper on her knee, she had passed it to me with: "Take care no one sees." Whereupon I had

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

unfolded it and read her message, which was: "I love you."

"But we mustn't sit here scribbling nonsense," she cried, turning impetuously, with a sudden gravity of demeanour, to Andrée and Rosemonde, "I ought to shew you the letter I got from Gisèle this morning. What an idiot I am; I've had it all this time in my pocket—and you can't think how important it may be to us." Gisèle had been moved to copy out for her friend, so that it might be passed on to the others, the essay which she had written in her certificate examination. Albertine's fears as to the difficulty of the subjects set had been more than justified by the two from which Gisèle had had to choose. The first was: "Sophocles, from the *Shades*, writes to Racine to console him for the failure of *Athalie*"; the other: "Suppose that, after the first performance of *Esther*, Mme. de Sévigné is writing to Mme. de La Fayette to tell her how much she regretted her absence." Now Gisèle, in an excess of zeal which ought to have touched the examiners' hearts, had chosen the former, which was also the more difficult of the two subjects, and had handled it with such remarkable skill that she had been given fourteen marks, and had been congratulated by the board. She would have received her "mention" if she had not "dried up" in the Spanish paper. The essay, a copy of which Gisèle had now sent her, was immediately read aloud to us by Albertine, for, having presently to pass the same examination, she was anxious to have an opinion from Andrée, who was by far the cleverest of them all and might be able to give her some good "tips". "She did have a bit of luck!" was Albertine's comment. "It's the very subject her French

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

mistress made her swot up while she was here." The letter from Sophocles to Racine, as drafted by Gisèle, ran as follows: "My dear friend, You must pardon me the liberty of addressing you when I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, but your latest tragedy, *Athalie* shews, does it not, that you have made the most thorough study of my own modest works. You have not only put poetry in the mouths of the protagonists, or principal persons of the drama, but you have written other, and, let me tell you without flattery, charming verses for the choruses, a feature which was not too bad, according to all one hears, in Greek Tragedy, but is a complete novelty in France. Nay more, your talent always so fluent, so finished, so winning, so fine, so delicate, has here acquired an energy on which I congratulate you. *Athalie*, *Joad*—these are figures which your rival Corneille could have wrought no better. The characters are virile, the plot simple and strong. You have given us a tragedy in which love is not the keynote, and on this I must offer you my sincerest compliments. The most familiar proverbs are not always the truest. I will give you an example:

"This passion treat, which makes the poet's art
Fly, as on wings, straight to the listener's heart."

You have shewn us that the religious sentiment in which your choruses are steeped is no less capable of moving us. The general public may have been puzzled at first, but those who are best qualified to judge must give you your due. I have felt myself impelled to offer you all my congratulations, to which I would add, my dear brother poet, an expression of my very highest esteem."

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Albertine's eyes, while she was reading this to us, had not ceased to sparkle. "Really, you'd think she must have cribbed it somewhere!" she exclaimed, as she reached the end. "I should never have believed that Gisèle could hatch out anything like as good! And the poetry she brings in! Where on earth can she have got that from?" Albertine's admiration, with a change, it is true, ~~of~~ object, but with no loss—an increase, rather—of intensity, combined with the closest attention to what was being said, continued to make her eyes "start from her head" all the time that Andrée (consulted as being the biggest of the band and more knowledgeable than the others) first of all spoke of Gisèle's essay with a certain irony, then with a levity of tone which failed to conceal her underlying seriousness proceeded to reconstruct the letter in her own way. "It is not badly done," she told Albertine," but if I were you and had the same subject set me, which is quite likely, as they do very often set that, I shouldn't do it in that way. This is how I would tackle it. Well, first of all, if I had been Gisèle, I should not have let myself get tied up, I should have begun by making a rough sketch of what I was going to write on a separate piece of paper. On the top line I should state the question and give an account of the subject, then the general ideas to be worked into the development. After that, appreciation, style, conclusion. In that way, with a summary to refer to, you know where you are. But at the very start, where she begins her account of the subject, or, if you like, Titine, since it's a letter we're speaking of, where she comes to the matter, Gisèle has gone off the rails altogether. Writing to a person of the seventeenth century, Sophocles ought never to have said, 'My

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

dear friend,'” “Why, of course, she ought to have said, ‘My dear Racine,’” came impetuously from Albertine. “That would have been much better.” “No,” replied Andrée, with a trace of mockery in her tone, “She ought to have put ‘Sir.’ In the same way, to end up, she ought to have thought of something like, ‘Suffer me, Sir, (at the very most, ‘Dear Sir’) to inform you of the sense of high esteem with which I have the honour to be your servant.’ Then again, Gisèle says that the choruses in *Athalie* are a novelty. She is forgetting *Esther*, and two tragedies that are not much read now but happen to have been analysed this year by the Professor himself, so that you need only mention them, since he’s got them on the brain, and you’re bound to pass. I mean *Les Juives*, by Robert Garnier, and Montchrestien’s *L’Aman*.” Andrée quoted these titles without managing quite to conceal a secret sense of benevolent superiority, which found expression in a smile, quite a delightful smile, for that matter. Albertine could contain herself no longer. “Andrée, you really are a perfect marvel,” she cried. “You must write down those names for me. Just fancy, what luck it would be if I got on to that, even in the oral, I should bring them in at once and make a colossal impression.” But in the days that followed, every time that Albertine begged Andrée just to tell her again the names of those two plays so that she might write them down, her blue-stockings friend seemed most unfortunately to have forgotten them, and left her none the wiser. “And another thing,” Andrée went on with the faintest note in her voice of scorn for companions so much younger than herself, though she relished their admiration and attached to the manner in which she herself would have

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

composed the essay a greater importance than she wanted us to think, "Sophocles in the Shades must be kept well-informed of all that goes on. He must know, therefore, that it was not before the general public but before the King's Majesty and a few privileged courtiers that *Athalie* was first played. What Gisèle says in this connexion of the esteem of qualified judges is not at all bad, but she might have gone a little farther. Sophocles, now that he is immortal, might quite well have the gift of prophecy and announce that, according to Voltaire, *Athalie* is to be the supreme achievement not of Racine merely but of the human mind." Albertine was drinking in every word. Her eyes blazed. And it was with the utmost indignation that she rejected Rosemonde's suggestion that they should begin to play. "And so," Andrée concluded, in the same easy, detached tone, blending a faint sneer with a certain warmth of conviction, "if Gisèle had noted down properly, first of all, the general ideas that she was going to develop, it might perhaps have occurred to her to do what I myself should have done, point out what a difference there is between the religious inspiration of Sophocles's choruses and Racine's. I should have made Sophocles remark that if Racine's choruses are instinct with religious feeling like those of the Greek Tragedians, the gods are not the same. The God of Joad has nothing in common with the god of Sophocles. And that brings us quite naturally, when we have finished developing the subject, to our conclusion: What does it matter if their beliefs are different? Sophocles would hesitate to insist upon such a point. He would be afraid of wounding Racine's convictions, and so, slipping in a few appropriate words on his masters at

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Port-Royal, he prefers to congratulate his disciple on the loftiness of his poetic genius."

Admiration and attention had so heated Albertine that great drops were rolling down her cheeks. Andrée preserved the unruffled calm of a female dandy. "It would not be a bad thing either to quote some of the opinions of famous critics," she added, before they began their game. "Yes," put in Albertine, "so I've been told. The best ones to quote, on the whole, are Sainte-Beuve and Merlet, aren't they?" "Well, you're not absolutely wrong," Andrée told her, "Merlet and Sainte-Beuve are by no means bad. But you certainly ought to mention Deltour and Gascq-Desfossés." She refused, however, despite Albertine's entreaties, to write down these two unfamiliar names.

Meanwhile I had been thinking of the little page torn from a scribbling block which Albertine had handed me. "I love you," she had written. And an hour later, as I scrambled down the paths which led back, a little too vertically for my liking, to Balbec, I said to myself that it was with her that I would have my romance.

The state of being indicated by the presence of all the signs by which we are accustomed to recognise that we are in love, such as the orders which I left in the hotel not to awaken me whoever might ask to see me, unless it were one or other of the girls, the beating of my heart while I waited for her (whichever of them it might be that I was expecting) and on those mornings my fury if I had not succeeded in finding a barber to shave me, and must appear with the disfigurement of a hairy chin before Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée, no doubt this state, recurring indifferently at the thought of one or

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

another, was as different from what we call love as is from human life the life of the zoophytes, where an existence, an individuality, if we may so term it, is divided up among several organisms. But natural history teaches us that such an organization of animal life is indeed to be observed, and that our own life, provided only that we have outgrown the first phase, is no less positive as to the reality of states hitherto unsuspected by us, through which we have to pass, and can then abandon them altogether. Such was for me this state of love divided among several girls at once. Divided—say rather undivided, for more often than not what was so delicious to me, different from the rest of the world, what was beginning to become so precious to me that the hope of finding it again on the morrow was the greatest happiness in my life, was rather the whole of the group of girls, taken as they were all together on those afternoons on the cliffs, during those lifeless hours, upon that strip of grass on which were laid those forms, so exciting to my imagination, of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée ; and that without my being able to say which of them it was that made those scenes so precious to me, which of them I was most anxious to love. At the start of a new love as at its ending, we are not exclusively attached to the object of that love, but rather the desire to be loving from which it will presently emerge (and, later on, the memory which it leaves behind) wanders voluptuously through a zone of interchangeable charms—simply natural charms, it may be, gratification of appetite, enjoyment of one's surroundings—which are so far harmonised among themselves that it does not in the presence of any one of them feel itself out of place. Besides, as my perception of

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

them was not yet dulled by familiarity, I had still the faculty of seeing them, that is to say of feeling a profound astonishment every time that I found myself in their presence. No doubt this astonishment is to some extent due to the fact that the other person on such occasions presents himself in a fresh aspect ; but so great is the multiformity of each of us, so abundant the wealth of lines of face and body, lines so few of which leave any trace, once we have parted from the other person, on the arbitrary simplicity of our memory. As our mind has selected some peculiarity that had struck us, has isolated it, exaggerated it, making of a woman who has appeared to us tall, a sketch in which her figure is absurdly elongated, or of a woman who has seemed to be pink-cheeked and golden-haired a pure 'Harmony in pink and gold', so, the moment that woman is once again standing before us, all the other forgotten qualities which restore the balance of that one remembered feature at once assail us, in their confused complexity, diminishing her height, paling her cheeks, and substituting for what we have come to her solely to seek other peculiarities which we remember now that we did notice the first time, and fail to understand how we can so far have forgotten to look out for again. We thought we remembered ; it was a peahen, surely ; we go to see it and find a peony. And this inevitable astonishment is not the only one ; for, side by side with it comes another, born of the difference, not now between the stereotyped forms of memory and reality, but between the person whom we saw last time and him who appears to us to-day from another angle and shews us another aspect. The human face is indeed, like the face of the God of some Oriental theogony, a

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

whole cluster of faces, crowded together but on different surfaces so that one does not see them all at once.

But to a great extent our astonishment springs from the other person's presenting to us also a face that is the same as before. It would require so immense an effort to reconstruct everything that has been imparted to us by things other than ourself—were it only the taste of a fruit—that no sooner is the impression received than we begin imperceptibly to descend the slope of memory and, without noticing anything, in a very short time, we have come a long way from what we actually felt. So that every fresh encounter is a sort of rectification, which brings us back to what we really did see. We have no longer any recollection of this, to such an extent does what we call remembering a person consist really in forgetting him. But so long as we can still see at the moment when the forgotten aspect appears, we recognise it, we are obliged to correct the straying line; thus the perpetual and fruitful surprise which made so salutary and invigorating for me these daily outings with the charming damsels of the sea shore, consisted fully as much in recognition as in discovery. When there is added to this the agitation aroused by what these girls were to me, which was never quite what I had supposed, and meant that my expectancy of our next meeting resembled not so much my expectancy the time before as the still throbbing memory of our latest conversation, it will be realised that each of our excursions made a violent interruption in the course of my thoughts and moved them clean out of the direction which, in the solitude of my own room, I had been able to trace for them at my leisure. That plotted course was forgotten, had ceased

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

to exist, when I returned home buzzing like a hive of bees with remarks which had disquieted me when I heard them and were still echoing in my brain. The other person is destroyed when we cease to see him ; after which his next appearance means a fresh creation of him, different from that which immediately preceded it, if not from them all. For the minimum variation that is to be found in these creations is duality. If we have in mind a strong and searching glance, a bold manner, it is inevitably, next time, by a half-languid profile, a sort of dreamy gentleness, overlooked by us in our previous impression, that we shall be, on meeting him again, astonished, that is to say almost solely struck. In confronting our memory with the new reality it is this that will mark the extent of our disappointment or surprise, will appear to us like the revised version of an earlier reality warning us that we had not remembered it correctly. In its turn, the facial aspect neglected the time before, and for that very reason the most striking this time, the most real, the most documentary, will become a matter for dreams and memories. It is a languorous and rounded profile, a gentle, dreamy expression which we shall now desire to see again. And then, next time, such resolution, such strength of character as there may be in the piercing eyes, the pointed nose, the tight lips, will come to correct the discrepancy between our desire and the object to which it has supposed itself to correspond. It is understood, of course, that this loyalty to the first and purely physical impressions which I formed afresh at each encounter with my friends did not involve only their facial appearance, since the reader has seen that I was sensible also of their voices, more disquieting still, per-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

haps (for not only does a voice offer the same strange and sensuous surfaces as a face, it issues from that unknown, inaccessible region the mere thought of which sets the mind swimming with unattainable kisses), their voices each like the unique sound of a little instrument into which the player put all her artistry and which was found only in her possession. Traced by a casual inflexion, a sudden deep chord in one of their voices would astonish me when I recognised after having forgotten it. So much so that the corrections which after every fresh meeting I was obliged to make so as to ensure absolute accuracy were as much those of a tuner or singing-master as a draughtsman's.

As for the harmonious cohesion in which had been neutralised for some time, by the resistance that each brought to bear against the expansion of the others, the several waves of sentiment set in motion in me by these girls, it was broken in Albertine's favour one afternoon when we were playing the game of "ferret". It was in a little wood on the cliff. Stationed between two girls, strangers to the little band, whom the band had brought in its train because we wanted that day to have a bigger party than usual, I gazed enviously at Albertine's neighbour, a young man, saying to myself that if I had been in his place I could have been touching my friend's hands all those miraculous moments which might perhaps never recur, and that this would have been but the first stage in a great advance. Already, by itself, and even without the consequences which it would probably have involved, the contact of Albertine's hands would have been delicious to me. Not that I had never seen prettier hands than hers. Even in the group of her friends, those of

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Andrée, slender hands and much finelier modelled, had as it were a private life of their own, obedient to the commands of their mistress, but independent, and used often to strain out before her like a leash of thoroughbred greyhounds, with lazy pauses, long dreams, sudden stretchings of a joint, seeing which Elstir had made a number of studies of these hands. And in one of them, in which you saw Andrée warming her hands at the fire, they had, with the light behind them, the gilded transparency of two autumn leaves. But, plumper than these, the hands of Albertine would yield for a moment, then resist the pressure of the hand that clasped them, giving a sensation that was quite peculiar to themselves. The act of pressing Albertine's hand had a sensual sweetness which was in keeping somehow with the rosy, almost mauve colouring of her skin. That pressure seemed to allow you to penetrate into the girl's being, to plumb the depths of her senses, like the ringing sound of her laughter, indecent as may be the cooing of doves or certain animal cries. She was the sort of woman with whom shaking hands affords so much pleasure that one feels grateful to civilisation for having made of the hand-clasp a lawful act between young men and girls when they meet. If the arbitrary code of good manners had replaced the clasp of hands by some other gesture, I should have gazed, day after day, at the unattainable hands of Albertine with a curiosity to know the feel of them as ardent as was my curiosity to learn the savour of her cheeks. But in the pleasure of holding her hand unrestrictedly in mine, had I been next to her at "ferret" I did not envisage that pleasure alone; what avowals, declarations silenced hitherto by my bashfulness, I could

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

have conveyed by certain pressures of hand on hand ; on her side, how easy it would have been for her, in responding by other pressures, to shew me that she accepted ; what complicity, what a vista of happiness stood open ! My love would be able to make more advance in a few minutes spent thus by her side than it had yet made in all the time that I had known her. Feeling that they would last but a short time, were rapidly nearing their end, since presumably we were not going on much longer with this game, and that once it was over I should be too late, I could not keep in my place for another moment. I let myself deliberately be caught with the ring, and, having gone into the middle, when the ring passed I pretended not to see it but followed its course with my eyes, waiting for the moment when it should come into the hands of the young man next to Albertine, who herself, peeling with helpless laughter, and in the excitement and pleasure of the game, was blushing like a rose. "Why, we really are in the Fairy Wood !" said Andrée to me, pointing to the trees that grew all round, with a smile in her eyes which was meant only for me and seemed to pass over the heads of the other players, as though we two alone were clever enough to double our parts, and make, in connexion with the game we were playing, a remark of a poetic nature. She even carried the delicacy of her fancy so far as to sing half-unconsciously : "The Ferret of the Wood has passed this way, Sweet Ladies ; he has passed by this way, the Ferret of Fairy Wood !" like those people who cannot visit Trianon without getting up a party in Louis XVI costume, or think it effective to have a song sung to its original setting. I should no doubt have been

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

sorry that I could see no charm in this piece of mimicry, had I had time to think of it. But my thoughts were all elsewhere. The players began to shew surprise at my stupidity in never getting the ring. I was looking at Albertine, so pretty, so indifferent, so gay, who, though she little knew it, was to be my neighbour when at last I should catch the ring in the right hands, thanks to a stratagem which she did not suspect, and would certainly have resented if she had. In the heat of the game her long hair had become loosened, and fell in curling locks over her cheeks on which it served to intensify, by its dry brownness, the carnation pink. "You have the tresses of Laura Dianti, of Eleanor of Guyenne, and of her descendant so beloved of Chateaubriand. You ought always to wear your hair half down like that," I murmured in her ear as an excuse for drawing close to her. Suddenly the ring passed to her neighbour. I sprang upon him at once, forced open his hands and seized it; he was obliged now to take my place inside the circle, while I took his beside Albertine. A few minutes earlier I had been envying this young man, when I saw that his hands as they slipped over the cord were constantly brushing against hers. Now that my turn was come, too shy to seek, too much moved to enjoy this contact, I no longer felt anything save the rapid and painful beating of my heart. At one moment Albertine leaned towards me, with an air of connivance, her round and rosy face, making a show of having the ring, so as to deceive the ferret, and keep him from looking in the direction in which she was just going to pass it. I realised at once that this was the sole object of Albertine's mysterious, confidential

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

gaze, but I was a little shocked to see thus kindle in her eyes the image—purely fictitious, invented to serve the needs of the game—of a secret, an understanding between her and myself which did not exist, but which from that moment seemed to me to be possible and would have been divinely sweet. While I was still being swept aloft by this thought, I felt a slight pressure of Albertine's hand against mine, and her caressing finger slip under my finger along the cord, and I saw her, at the same moment, give me a wink which she tried to make pass unperceived by the others. At once, a mass of hopes, invisible hitherto by myself, crystallised within me. "She is taking advantage of the game to let me feel that she really does love me," I thought to myself, in an acme of joy, from which no sooner had I reached it than I fell, on hearing Albertine mutter furiously: "Why can't you take it? I've been shoving it at you for the last hour." Stunned with grief, I let go the cord, the ferret saw the ring and swooped down on it, and I had to go back into the middle, where I stood helpless, in despair, looking at the unbridled rout which continued to circle round me, stung by the jeering shouts of all the players, obliged, in reply, to laugh when I had so little mind for laughter, while Albertine kept on repeating: "People can't play if they don't pay attention, and spoil the game for the others. He shan't be asked again when we're going to play, Andrée; if he is, I don't come." Andrée, with a mind above the game, still chanting her "Fairy Wood" which, in a spirit of imitation, Rosemonde had taken up too, but without conviction, sought to make a diversion from Albertine's reproaches by saying to me: "We're quite close to those old Creuniers you wanted so much

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

to see. Look, I'll take you there by a dear little path, and we'll leave these silly idiots to go on, playing like babies in the nursery." As Andrée was extremely nice to me, as we went along I said to her everything about Albertine that seemed calculated to make me attractive to the latter. Andrée replied that she too was very fond of Albertine, thought her charming; in spite of which the compliments that I was paying to her friend did not seem altogether to please her. Suddenly, in the little sunken path, I stopped short, touched to the heart by an exquisite memory of my childhood. I had just recognised, by the fretted and glossy leaves which it thrust out towards me, a hawthorn-bush, flowerless, alas, now that spring was over. Around me floated the atmosphere of far-off Months of Mary, of Sunday afternoons, of beliefs, or errors long ago forgotten. I wanted to stay it in its passage. I stood still for a moment, and Andrée, with a charming divination of what was in my mind, left me to converse with the leaves of the bush. I asked them for news of the flowers, those hawthorn flowers that were like merry little girls headstrong, provocative, pious. "The young ladies have been gone from here for a long time now," the leaves told me. And perhaps they thought that, for the great friend of those young ladies that I pretended to be, I seemed to have singularly little knowledge of their habits. A great friend, but one who had never been to see them again for all these years, despite his promises. And yet, as Gilberte had been my first love among girls, so these had been my first love among flowers. "Yes, I know all that, they leave about the middle of June," I answered, "but I am so delighted to see the place where they

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

stayed when they were here. They came to see me, too, at Combray, in my room ; my mother brought them when I was ill in bed. And we used to meet on Saturday evenings, too, at the Month of Mary devotions. Can they get to them from here ?” “ Oh, of course ! Why, they make a special point of having our young ladies at Saint-Denis du Désert, the church near here.” “ Then, if I want to see them now ?” “ Oh, not before May, next year.” “ But I can be sure that they will be here ?” “ They come regularly every year.” “ Only I don’t know whether it will be easy to find the place.” “ Oh, dear, yes ! They are so gay, the young ladies, they stop laughing only to sing hymns together, so that you can’t possibly miss them, you can tell by the scent from the other end of the path.”

I caught up Andrée, and began again to sing Albertine’s praises. It was inconceivable to me that she would not repeat what I said to her friend, seeing the emphasis that I put into it. And yet I never heard that Albertine had been told. Andrée had, nevertheless, a far greater understanding of the things of the heart, a refinement of nice behaviour ; finding the look, the word, the action that could most ingeniously give pleasure, keeping to herself a remark that might possibly cause pain, making a sacrifice (and making it as though it were no sacrifice at all) of an afternoon’s play, or it might be an “ at home ” or a garden party in order to stay beside a friend who was feeling sad, and thus shew him or her that she preferred the simple company of a friend to frivolous pleasures ; these were her habitual delicacies. But when one knew her a little better one would have said that it was with her as with those heroic

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

cravens who wish not to be afraid, and whose bravery is especially meritorious, one would have said that in her true character there was none of that generosity which she displayed at every moment out of moral distinction, or sensibility, or a noble desire to shew herself a true friend. When I listened to all the charming things she was saying to me about a possible affection between Albertine and myself it seemed as though she were bound to do everything in her power to bring it to pass. Whereas, by mere chance perhaps, not even of the least of the various minor opportunities which were at her disposal and might have proved effective in uniting me to Albertine did she ever make any use, and I would not swear that my effort to make myself loved by Albertine did not—if not provoke in her friend secret stratagems destined to bring it to nought—at any rate arouse in her an anger which however she took good care to hide and against which even, in her delicacy of feeling, she may herself have fought. Of the countless refinements of goodness which Andrée shewed Albertine would have been incapable, and yet I was not certain of the underlying goodness of the former as I was to be, later on, of the latter's. Shewing herself always tenderly indulgent to the exuberant frivolity of Albertine, Andrée would greet her with speeches, with smiles which were those of a friend, better still, she always acted towards her as a friend. I have seen her, day after day, in order to give the benefit of her own wealth, to bring some happiness to this penniless friend take, without any possibility of advantage to herself, more pains than a courtier would take who sought to win his sovereign's favour. She was charmingly gentle always, charming

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

in her choice of sweet, pathetic expressions, when you said to her, what a pity it was that Albertine was so poor, and took infinitely more trouble on her behalf than she would have taken for a wealthy friend. But if anyone were to hint that Albertine was perhaps not quite so poor as people made out, a just discernible cloud would veil the light of Andrée's eyes and brow ; she seemed out of temper. And if you went on to say that after all Albertine might perhaps be less difficult to marry off than people supposed, she would vehemently contradict you, repeating almost angrily : " Oh dear, no ; she will never get married ! I am quite certain of it ; it is a dreadful worry to me ! " In so far as I myself was concerned, Andrée was the only one of the girls who would never have repeated to me anything not very pleasant that might have been said about me by a third person ; more than that, if it were I who told her what had been said she would make a pretence of not believing it, or would furnish some explanation which made the remark inoffensive ; it is the aggregate of these qualities that goes by the name of tact. Tact is the attribute of those people who, if we have called a man out in a duel, congratulate us and add that there was no necessity, really ; so as to enhance still further in our own eyes, the courage of which we have given proof without having been forced to do so. They are the opposite of the people who, in similar circumstances, say : " It must have been a horrid nuisance for you, fighting a duel, but on the other hand you couldn't possibly swallow an insult like that, there was nothing else to be done." But as there is always something to be said on both sides, if the pleasure, or at least the indifference shewn by

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

our friends in repeating something offensive that they have heard said about us, proves that they do not exactly put themselves in our skin at the moment of speaking, but thrust in the pin-point, turn the knife-blade as though it were gold-beater's skin and not human, the art of always keeping hidden from us what might be disagreeable to us in what they have heard said about our actions, or in the opinion which those actions have led the speakers themselves to form of us, proves that there is in the other kind of friends, in the friends who are so full of tact, a strong vein of dissimulation. It does no harm if indeed they are incapable of thinking evil, and if what is said by other people only makes them suffer as it would make us. I supposed this to be the case with Andrée, without, however, being absolutely sure.

We had left the little wood and had followed a network of overgrown paths through which Andrée managed to find her way with great skill. Suddenly, "Look now," she said to me, "there are your famous Creuniers, and, I say, you are in luck, it's just the time of day, and the light is the same as when Elstir painted them." But I was still too wretched at having fallen, during the game of "ferret", from such a pinnacle of hopes. And so it was not with the pleasure which otherwise I should doubtless have felt that I caught sight, almost below my feet, crouching among the rocks, where they had gone for protection from the heat, of marine goddesses for whom Elstir had lain in wait and surprised them there, beneath a dark glaze as lovely as Leonardo would have painted, the marvellous Shadows, sheltered and furtive, nimble and voiceless, ready at the first glimmer of light

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

to slip behind the stone, to hide in a cranny, and prompt, once the menacing ray had passed, to return to rock or seaweed beneath the sun that crumbled the cliffs and the colourless ocean, over whose slumbers they seemed to be watching, motionless lightfoot guardians letting appear on the water's surface their viscous bodies and the attentive gaze of their deep blue eyes.

We went back to the wood to pick up the other girls and go home together. I knew now that I was in love with Albertine ; but, alas ! I had no thought of letting her know it. This was because, since the days of our games in the Champs-Élysées, my conception of love had become different, even if the persons to whom my love was successively assigned remained practically the same. For one thing, the avowal, the declaration of my passion to her whom I loved no longer seemed to me one of the vital and necessary incidents of love, nor love itself an external reality, but simply a subjective pleasure. And as for this pleasure, I felt that Albertine would do everything necessary to furnish it, all the more since she would not know that I was enjoying it.

As we walked home the image of Albertine, bathed in the light that streamed from the other girls, was not the only one that existed for me. But as the moon, which is no more than a tiny white cloud of a more definite and fixed shape than other clouds during the day, assumes her full power as soon as daylight dies, so when I was once more in the hotel it was Albertine's sole image that rose from my heart and began to shine. My room seemed to me to have become suddenly a new place. Of course, for a long time past, it had not been the hostile room of my first night in it. All our lives, we

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

go on patiently modifying the surroundings in which we dwell ; and gradually, as habit dispenses us from feeling them, we suppress the noxious elements of colour, shape and smell which were at the root of our discomfort. Nor was it any longer the room, still potent enough over my sensibility, not certainly to make me suffer, but to give me joy, the fount of summer days, like a marble basin in which, half way up its polished sides, they mirrored an azure surface steeped in light over which glided for an instant, impalpable and white as a wave of heat, a shadowy and fleeting cloud ; not the room, wholly aesthetic, of the pictorial evening hours ; it was the room in which I had been now for so many days that I no longer saw it. And now I was just beginning again to open my eyes to it, but this time from the selfish angle which is that of love. I liked to feel that the fine big mirror across one corner, the handsome bookcases with their fronts of glass would give Albertine, if she came to see me, a good impression of myself. Instead of a place of transit in which I would stay for a few minutes before escaping to the beach or to Rivebelle, my room became real and dear to me, fashioned itself anew, for I looked at and appreciated each article of its furniture with the eyes of Albertine.

A few days after the game of "ferret", when having allowed ourselves to wander rather too far afield, we had been fortunate in finding at Maineville a couple of little "tubs" with two seats in each which would enable us to be back in time for dinner, the keenness, already intense, of my love for Albertine, had the following effect, first of all, that it was Rosemonde and Andrée in turn that I invited to be my companion, and never once Al-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

bertine, after which, in spite of my manifest preference for Andrée or Rosemonde, I led everybody, by secondary considerations of time and distance, cloaks and so forth, to decide, as though against my wishes, that the most practical policy was that I should take Albertine, to whose company I pretended to resign myself for good or ill. Unfortunately, since love tends to the complete assimilation of another person, while other people are not comestible by way of conversation alone, Albertine might be (and indeed was) as friendly as possible to me on our way home ; when I had deposited her at her own door she left me happy but more famished for her even than I had been at the start, and reckoning the moments that we had spent together as only a prelude, of little importance in itself, to those that were still to come. And yet this prelude had that initial charm which is not to be found again. I had not yet asked anything of Albertine. She could imagine what I wanted, but, not being certain of it, would suppose that I was tending only towards relations without any definite purpose, in which my friend would find that delicious vagueness, rich in surprising fulfillments of expectations, which is true romance.

In the week that followed I scarcely attempted to see Albertine. I made a show of preferring Andrée. Love is born ; one would like to remain, for her whom one loves, the unknown whom she may love in turn, but one has need of her, one requires contact not so much with her body as with her attention, her heart. One slips into a letter some spiteful expression which will force the indifferent reader to ask for some little kindness in compensation, and love, following an unvarying procedure, sets going with an alternating movement the

machinery in which one can no longer either refrain from loving or be loved. I gave to Andrée the hours spent by the others at a party which I knew that she would sacrifice for my sake, with pleasure, and would have sacrificed even with reluctance, from a moral nicety, so as not to let either the others or herself think that she attached any importance to a relatively frivolous amusement. I arranged in this way to have her entirely to myself every evening, meaning not to make Albertine jealous, but to improve my position in her eyes, or at any rate not to imperil it by letting Albertine know that it was herself and not Andrée that I loved. Nor did I confide this to Andrée either, lest she should repeat it to her friend. When I spoke of Albertine to Andrée I affected a coldness by which she was perhaps less deceived than I by her apparent credulity. She made a show of believing in my indifference to Albertine, of desiring the closest possible union between Albertine and myself. It is probable that, on the contrary, she neither believed in the one nor wished for the other. While I was saying to her that I did not care very greatly for her friend, I was thinking of one thing only, how to become acquainted with Mme. Bontemps, who was staying for a few days near Balbec, and to whom Albertine was going presently on a short visit. Naturally I did not let Andrée become aware of this desire, and when I spoke to her of Albertine's people, it was in the most careless manner possible. Andrée's direct answers did not appear to throw any doubt on my sincerity. Why then did she blurt out suddenly, about that time : "Oh, guess who' I've just seen—Albertine's aunt !" It is true that she had not said in so many words : "I could see through your casual remarks all

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

right that the one thing you were really thinking of was how you could make friends with Albertine's aunt." But it was clearly to the presence in Andrée's mind of some such idea which she felt it more becoming to keep from me that the word "just" seemed to point. It was of a kind with certain glances, certain gestures which, for all that they have not a form that is logical, rational, deliberately calculated to match the listener's intelligence, reach him nevertheless in their true significance, just as human speech, converted into electricity in the telephone, is turned into speech again when it strikes the ear. In order to remove from Andrée's mind the idea that I was interested in Mme. Bontemps, I spoke of her from that time onwards not only carelessly but with downright malice, saying that I had once met that idiot of a woman, and trusted I should never have that experience again. Whereas I was seeking by every means in my power to meet her.

I tried to induce Elstir (but without mentioning to anyone else that I had asked him) to speak to her about me and to bring us together. He promised to introduce me to her, though he seemed greatly surprised at my wishing it, for he regarded her as a contemptible woman, a born intriguer, as little interesting as she was disinterested. Reflecting that if I did see Mme. Bontemps, Andrée would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, I thought it best to warn her in advance. "The things one tries hardest to avoid are what one finds one cannot escape," I told her. "Nothing in the world could bore me so much as meeting Mme. Bontemps again, and yet I can't get out of it, Elstir has arranged to invite us together." "I have never doubted it for a single in-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

stant," exclaimed Andrée in a bitter tone, while her eyes, enlarged and altered by her annoyance, focussed themselves upon some invisible object. These words of Andrée's were not the most reasoned statement of a thought which might be expressed thus: "I know that you are in love with Albertine, and that you are working day and night to get in touch with her people." But they were the shapeless fragments, easily pieced together again by me, of some such thought which I had exploded by striking it, through the shield of Andrée's self-control. Like her "just", these words had no meaning save in the second degree, that is to say they were words of the sort which (rather than direct affirmatives) inspires in us respect or distrust for another person, and leads to a rupture.

If Andrée had not believed me when I told her that Albertine's relatives left me indifferent, that was because she thought that I was in love with Albertine. And probably she was none too happy in the thought.

She was generally present as a third party at my meetings with her friend. And yet there were days when I was to see Albertine by herself, days to which I looked forward with feverish impatience, which passed without bringing me any decisive result, without having, any of them, been that cardinal day whose part I immediately entrusted to the day that was to follow, which would prove no more apt to play it; thus there crumbled and collapsed, one after another, like waves of the sea, those peaks at once replaced by others.

About a month after the day on which we had played "ferret" together, I learned that Albertine was going away next morning to spend a couple of days with Mme.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Bontemps, and, since she would have to start early, was coming to sleep that night at the Grand Hotel, from which, by taking the omnibus, she would be able, without disturbing the friends with whom she was staying, to catch the first train in the morning. I mentioned this to Andrée. "I don't believe a word of it," she replied, with a look of annoyance. "Anyhow it won't help ~~you~~ at all, for I'm quite sure Albertine won't want to see you if she goes to the hotel by herself. It wouldn't be 'regulation'," she added, employing an epithet which had recently come into favour with her, in the sense of "what is done". "I tell you this because I understand Albertine. What difference do you suppose it makes to me whether you see her or not? Not the slightest, I can assure you!"

We were joined by Octave who had no hesitation in telling Andrée the number of strokes he had gone round in, the day before, at golf, then by Albertine, counting her diabolos as she walked along, like a nun telling her beads. Thanks to this pastime she could be left alone for hours on end without growing bored. As soon as she joined us I became conscious of the obstinate tip of her nose, which I had omitted from my mental pictures of her during the last few days; beneath her dark hair the vertical front of her brow controverted—and not for the first time—the indefinite image that I had preserved of her, while its whiteness made a vivid splash in my field of vision; emerging from the dust of memory, Albertine was built up afresh before my eyes. Golf gives one a taste for solitary pleasures. The pleasure to be derived from diabolos is undoubtedly one of these. And yet, after she had joined us, Albertine continued to toss

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

up and catch her missile, just as a lady on whom friends have come to call does not on their account stop working at her crochet. "I hear that Mme. de Villeparisis," she remarked to Octave, "has been complaining to your father." I could hear, underlying the word, one of those notes that were peculiar to Albertine; always, just as I had made certain that I had forgotten them, I would be reminded of a glimpse caught through them before of Albertine's determined and typically Gallic mien. I might have been blind, and yet have detected certain of her qualities, alert and slightly provincial, from those notes, just as plainly as from the tip of her nose. These were equivalent and might have been substituted for one another, and her voice was like what we are promised in the photo-telephone of the future; the visual image was clearly outlined in the sound.) "She's not written only to your father, either, she wrote to the Mayor of Balbec at the same time, to say that we must stop playing diabolos on the 'front' as somebody hit her in the face with one." "Yes, I was hearing about that. It's too silly. There's little enough to do here as it is." Andrée did not join in the conversation; she was not acquainted, any more than was Albertine or Octave, with Mme. de Villeparisis. She did, however, remark: "I can't think why this lady should make such a song about it. Old Mme. de Cambremer got hit in the face, and she never complained." "I will explain the difference," replied Octave gravely, striking a match as he spoke. "It's my belief that Mme. de Cambremer is a woman of the world, and Mme. de Villeparisis is just an upstart. Are you playing golf this afternoon?" and he left us, followed by Andrée.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

I was alone now with Albertine. "Do you see," she began, "I'm wearing my hair now the way you like—look at my tingle. They all laugh at me and nobody knows who's I'm doing it for. My aunt will laugh at me too. But I shan't tell her why, either." I had a side-long view of Albertine's cheeks, which often appeared pale, but, seen thus, were flushed with a coursing stream of blood which lighted them up, gave them that dazzling clearness which certain winter mornings have when the stones sparkling in the sun seem blocks of pink granite and radiate joy. The joy that I was drawing at this moment from the sight of Albertine's cheeks was equally keen, but led to another desire on my part, which was not to walk with her but to take her in my arms. I asked her if the report of her plans which I had heard were correct. "Yes," she told me, "I shall be sleeping at your hotel to-night, and in fact as I've got rather a chill, I shall be going to bed before dinner. You can come and sit by my bed and watch me eat, if you like, and afterwards we'll play at anything you choose. I should have liked you to come to the station to-morrow morning, but I'm afraid it might look rather odd, I don't say to Andrée, who is a sensible person, but to the others who will be there; if my aunt got to know, I should never hear the last of it. But we can spend the evening together, at any rate. My aunt will know nothing about that. I must go and say good-bye to Andrée. So long, then. Come early, so that we can have a nice long time together," she added, smiling. At these words I was swept back past the days in which I loved Gilberte to those in which love seemed to me not only an external entity but one that could be realised as a whole.

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

Whereas the Gilberte whom I used to see in the Champs-Élysées was a different Gilberte from the one whom I found waiting inside myself when I was alone again, suddenly in the real Albertine, her whom I saw every day, whom I supposed to be stuffed with middle-class prejudices and entirely open with her aunt, there was incarnate the imaginary Albertine, she whom, when I still did not know her, I had suspected of casting furtive glances at myself on the "front", she who had worn an air of being reluctant to go indoors when she saw me making off in the other direction.

I went in to dinner with my grandmother. I felt within me a secret which she could never guess. Similarly with Albertine; to-morrow her friends would be with her, not knowing what novel experience she and I had in common; and when she kissed her niece on the brow Mme. Bontemps would never imagine that I stood between them, in that arrangement of Albertine's hair which had for its object, concealed from all the world, to give me pleasure, me who had until then so greatly envied Mme. Bontemps because, being related to the same people as her niece, she had the same occasions to don mourning, the same family visits to pay; and now I found myself meaning more to Albertine than did the aunt herself. When she was with her aunt, it was of me that she would be thinking. What was going to happen that evening, I scarcely knew. In any event, the Grand Hotel, the evening would no longer seem empty to me; they contained my happiness. I rang for the lift-boy to take me up to the room which Albertine had engaged, a room that looked over the valley. The slightest movements, such as that of sitting down on the bench in

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

the lift, were satisfying, because they were in direct relation to my heart ; I saw in the ropes that drew the cage upwards, in the few steps that I had still to climb, only a materialisation of the machinery, the stages of my joy. I had only two or three steps to take now along the corridor before coming to that room in which was enshrined the precious substance of that rosy form—that room which, even if there were to be done in it delicious things, would keep that air of permanence, of being, to a chance visitor who knew nothing of its history, just like any other room, which makes of inanimate things the obstinately mute witnesses, the scrupulous confidants, the inviolable depositaries of our pleasure. Those few steps from the landing to Albertine's door, those few steps which no one now could prevent my taking, I took with delight, with prudence, as though plunged into a new and strange element, as if in going forward I had been gently displacing the liquid stream of happiness, and at the same time with a strange feeling of absolute power, and of entering at length into an inheritance which had belonged to me from all time. Then suddenly I reflected that it was wrong to be in any doubt ; she had told me to come when she was in bed. It was as clear as daylight ; I pranced for joy, I nearly knocked over Françoise who was standing in my way, I ran, with glowing eyes, towards my friend's room. I found Albertine in bed. Leaving her throat bare, her white nightgown altered the proportions of her face, which, flushed by being in bed or by her cold or by dinner, seemed pinker than before ; I thought of the colours which I had had, a few hours earlier, displayed beside me, on the "front", the savour of which I was now at last to taste ; her cheek

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

was crossed obliquely by one of those long, dark, curling tresses, which, to please me, she had undone altogether. She looked at me and smiled. Beyond her, through the window, the valley lay bright beneath the moon. The sight of Albertine's bare throat, of those strangely vivid cheeks, had so intoxicated me (that is to say had placed the reality of the world for me no longer in nature, but in the torrent of my sensations which it was all I could do to keep within bounds), as to have destroyed the balance between the life, immense and indestructible, which circulated in my being, and the life of the universe, so puny in comparison. The sea, which was visible through the window as well as the valley, the swelling breasts of the first of the Maineville cliffs, the sky in which the moon had not yet climbed to the zenith, all of these seemed less than a featherweight on my eyeballs, which between their lids I could feel dilated, resisting, ready to bear very different burdens, all the mountains of the world upon their fragile surface. Their orbit no longer found even the sphere of the horizon adequate to fill it. And everything that nature could have brought me of life would have seemed wretchedly meagre, the sigh of the waves far too short a sound to express the enormous aspiration that was surging in my breast. I bent over Albertine to kiss her. Death might have struck me down in that moment ; it would have seemed to me a trivial, or rather an impossible thing, for life was not outside, it was in me ; I should have smiled pityingly had a philosopher then expressed the idea that some day, even some distant day, I should have to die, that the external forces of nature would survive me, the forces of that nature beneath whose godlike feet I was no more than a grain of

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

dust ; that, after me, there would still remain those rounded, swelling cliffs, that sea, that moonlight and that sky ! How was that possible ; how could the world last longer than myself, since it was it that was enclosed in me, in me whom it went a long way short of filling, in me, where, feeling that there was room to store so many other treasures, I flung contemptuously into a corner sky, sea and cliffs. “Stop that, or I’ll ring the bell !” cried Albertine, seeing that I was flinging myself upon her to kiss her. But I reminded myself that it was not for no purpose that a girl made a young man come to her room in secret, arranging that her aunt should not know—that boldness, moreover, rewards those who know how to seize their opportunities ; in the state of exaltation in which I was, the round face of Albertine, lighted by an inner flame, like the glass bowl of a lamp, started into such prominence that, copying the rotation of a burning sphere, it seemed to me to be turning, like those faces of Michael Angelo which are being swept past in the arrested headlong flight of a whirlwind. I was going to learn the fragrance, the flavour which this strange pink fruit concealed. I heard a sound, precipitous, prolonged, shrill. Albertine had pulled the bell with all her might.

*

* *

I had supposed that the love which I felt for Albertine was not based on the hope of carnal possession. And yet, when the lesson to be drawn from my experience that evening was, apparently, that such possession was impossible ; when, after having had not the least doubt, that first day, on the beach, of Albertine’s being un-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

chaste, and having then passed through various intermediate assumptions, I seemed to have quite definitely reached the conclusion that she was absolutely virtuous ; when, on her return from her aunt's, a week later, she greeted me coldly with : " I forgive you ; in fact I'm sorry to have upset you, but you must never do it again,"—then, in contrast to what I had felt on learning from Bloch that one could always have all the women one liked, and as if, in place of a real girl, I had known a wax doll, it came to pass that gradually there detached itself from her my desire to penetrate into her life, to follow her through the places in which she had spent her childhood, to be initiated by her into the athletic life ; my intellectual curiosity to know what were her thoughts on this subject or that did not survive my belief that I might take her in my arms if I chose. My dreams abandoned her, once they had ceased to be nourished by the hope of a possession of which I had supposed them to be independent. Thenceforward they found themselves once more at liberty to transmit themselves, according to the attraction that I had found in her on any particular day, above all according to the chances that I seemed to detect of my being, possibly, one day, loved by her—to one or another of Albertine's friends, and to Andrée first of all. And yet, if Albertine had not existed, perhaps I should not have had the pleasure which I began to feel more and more strongly during the days that followed in the kindness that was shewn me by Andrée. Albertine told me one of the checks which I had received at her hands. She was one of those pretty girls who, from their earliest youth, by their beauty, but especially by an attraction, a charm which remains some-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

what mysterious and has its source perhaps in reserves of vitality to which others less favoured by nature come to quench their thirst, have always—in their home circle, among their friends, in society—proved more attractive than other more beautiful and richer girls ; she was one of those people from whom, before the age of love and ever so much more after it is reached, one asks more than they ask in return, more even than they are able to give. From her childhood Albertine had always had round her in an adoring circle four or five little girl friends, among them Andrée who was so far her superior and knew it (and perhaps this attraction which Albertine exerted quite involuntarily had been the origin, had laid the foundations of the little band). This attraction was still potent even at a great social distance, in circles quite brilliant in comparison, where if there was a pavane to be danced, they would send for Albertine rather than have it danced by another girl of better family. The consequence was that, not having a penny to her name, living a hard enough life, moreover, on the hands of M. Bontemps, who was said to be “on the rocks”, and was anyhow anxious to be rid of her, she was nevertheless invited, not only to dine but to stay, by people who, in Saint-Loup’s sight, might not have had any distinction, but to Rosemonde’s mother or Andrée’s, women who though very rich themselves did not know these other and richer people, represented something quite incalculable. Thus Albertine spent a few weeks every year with the family of one of the Governors of the Bank of France, who was also Chairman of the Board of Directors of a great Railway Company. The wife of this financier entertained people of importance, and had never men-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

tioned her "day" to Andrée's mother, who thought her wanting in politeness, but was nevertheless prodigiously interested in everything that went on in her house. Accordingly she encouraged Andrée every year to invite Albertine down to their villa, because, as she said, it was a real charity to offer a holiday by the sea to a girl who had not herself the means to travel and whose aunt did so little for her; Andrée's mother was probably not prompted by the thought that the banker and his wife, learning that Albertine was made much of by her and her daughter, would form a high opinion of them both; still less did she hope that Albertine, good and clever as she was, would manage to get her invited, or at least to get Andrée invited to the financier's garden-parties. But every evening at the dinner-table, while she assumed an air of indifference slightly tinged with contempt, she was fascinated by Albertine's accounts of everything that had happened at the big house while she was staying there, and the names of the other guests, almost all of them people whom she knew by sight or by name. True, the thought that she knew them only in this indirect fashion, that is to say did not know them at all (she called this kind of acquaintance knowing people "all my life"), gave Andrée's mother a touch of melancholy while she plied Albertine with questions about them in a lofty and distant tone, speaking with closed lips, and might have left her doubtful and uneasy as to the importance of her own social position had she not been able to reassure herself, to return safely to the "realities of life", by saying to the butler: "Please tell the chef that he has not made the peas soft enough." She then recovered her serenity. And she was quite

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

determined that Andrée was to marry nobody but a man—of the best family, of course—but rich enough for her too to be able to keep a chef and a couple of coachmen. This was the proof positive, the practical indication of “position”. But the fact that Albertine had dined at the banker’s house in the country with this, or that great lady, and that the said great lady had invited the girl to stay with her next winter, did not invalidate a sort of special consideration which Albertine shewed towards Andrée’s mother, which went very well with the pity, and even repulsion, excited by the tale of her misfortunes, a repulsion increased by the fact that M. Bontemps had proved a traitor to the cause (he was even, people said, vaguely Panamist) and had rallied to the Government. Not that this deterred Andrée’s mother, in her passion for abstract truth, from withering with her scorn the people who appeared to believe that Albertine was of humble origin. “What’s that you say? Why, they’re one of the best families in the country. Simonet with a single ‘n’, you know!” Certainly, in view of the class of society in which all this went on, in which money plays so important a part, and mere charm makes people ask you out but not marry you, a “comfortable” marriage did not appear to be for Albertine a practical outcome of the so distinguished patronage which she enjoyed but which would not have been held to compensate for her poverty. But even by themselves, and with no prospect of any matrimonial consequence, Albertine’s “successes” in society excited the envy of certain spiteful mothers, furious at seeing her received like one of the family by the banker’s wife, even by Andrée’s mother, neither of whom they themselves really

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

knew. They therefore went about telling common friends of those ladies and their own that both ladies would be very angry if they knew the facts, which were that Albertine repeated to each of them everything that the intimacy to which she was rashly admitted enabled her to spy out in the household of the other, a thousand little secrets which it must be infinitely unpleasant to the interested party to have made public. These envious women said this so that it might be repeated and might get Albertine into trouble with her patrons. But, as often happens, their machinations met with no success. The spite that prompted them was too apparent, and their only result was to make the women who had planned them appear rather more contemptible than before. Andrée's mother was too firm in her opinion of Albertine to change her mind about her now. She looked upon her as a "poor wretch", but the best-natured girl living, and one who would do anything in the world to give pleasure.

If this sort of select popularity to which Albertine had attained did not seem likely to lead to any practical result, it had stamped Andrée's friend with the distinctive marks of people who, being always sought after, have never any need to offer themselves, marks (to be found also, and for analogous reasons, at the other end of the social scale among the leaders of fashion) which consist in their not making any display of the successes they have scored, but rather keeping them to themselves. She would never say to anyone: "So-and-so is anxious to meet me," would speak of everyone with the greatest good nature, and as if it had been she who ran after, who sought to know other people, and not they. If you

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

spoke of a young man who, a few minutes earlier, had been, in private conversation with her, heaping the bitterest reproaches upon her because she had refused him an assignation, so far from proclaiming this in public, or betraying any resentment she would stand up for him : "He is such a nice boy !" Indeed it quite annoyed her when she attracted people, because that compelled her to disappoint them, whereas her natural instinct was always to give pleasure. So much did she enjoy giving pleasure that she had come to employ a particular kind of falsehood, found among utilitarians and men who have "arrived". Existing besides in an embryonic state in a vast number of people, this form of insincerity consists in not being able to confine the pleasure arising out of a single act of politeness to a single person. For instance, if Albertine's aunt wished her niece to accompany her to a party which was not very lively, Albertine might have found it sufficient to extract from the incident the moral profit of having given pleasure to her aunt. But being courteously welcomed by her host and hostess, she thought it better to say to them that she had been wanting to see them for so long that she had finally seized this opportunity and begged her aunt to take her to their party. Even this was not enough : at the same party there happened to be one of Albertine's friends who was in great distress. "I did not like the idea of your being here by yourself. I thought it might do you good to have me with you. If you would rather come away from here, go somewhere else, I am ready to do anything you like ; all I want is to see you look not so sad."—Which, as it happened, was true also. Sometimes it happened however that the fictitious object

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

destroyed the real. Thus, Albertine, having a favour to ask on behalf of one of her friends, went on purpose to see a certain lady who could help her. But on arriving at the house of this lady—a kind and sympathetic soul—the girl, unconsciously following the principle of utilising a single action in a number of ways, felt it to be more ingratiating to appear to have come there solely on account of the pleasure she knew she would derive from seeing the lady again. The lady was deeply touched that Albertine should have taken a long journey purely out of friendship for herself. Seeing her almost overcome by emotion, Albertine began to like the lady still better. Only, there was this awkward consequence : she now felt so keenly the pleasure of friendship which she pretended to have been her motive in coming, that she was afraid of making the lady suspect the genuineness of sentiments which were actually quite sincere if she now asked her to do the favour, whatever it may have been, for her friend. The lady would think that Albertine had come for that purpose, which was true, but would conclude also that Albertine had no disinterested pleasure in seeing her, which was not. With the result that she came away without having asked the favour, like a man sometimes who has been so good to a woman, in the hope of winning her, that he refrains from declaring his passion in order to preserve for his goodness an air of nobility. In other instances it would be wrong to say that the true object was sacrificed to the subordinate and subsequently conceived idea, but the two were so far incompatible that if the person to whom Albertine endeared herself by stating the second had known of the existence of the first, his pleasure would at once have

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

been turned into the deepest annoyance. At a much later point in this story, we shall have occasion to see this kind of incompatibility expressed in clearer terms. Let us say for the present, borrowing an example of a completely different order, that they occur very frequently in the most divergent situations that life has to offer. A husband has established his mistress in the town where he is quartered with his regiment. His wife, left by herself in Paris, and with an inkling of the truth, grows more and more miserable, and writes her husband letters embittered by jealousy. Very well; the mistress is obliged to go up to Paris for the day. The husband cannot resist her entreaties that he will go with her, and applies for short leave, which is granted. But as he is a good-natured fellow, and hates to make his wife unhappy, he goes to her and tells her, shedding a few quite genuine tears, that, driven to desperation by her letters, he has found the means of getting away from his duties to come to her, to console her in his arms. He has thus contrived by a single journey to furnish wife and mistress alike with proofs of his affection. But if the wife were to learn the reason for which he has come to Paris, her joy would doubtless be turned into grief, unless her pleasure in seeing the faithless wretch outweighed, in spite of everything, the pain that his infidelities had caused her. Among the men who have struck me as practising with most perseverance this system of what might be called killing any number of birds with one stone, must be included M. de Norpois. He would now and then agree to act as intermediary between two of his friends who had quarrelled, which led to his being called the most obliging of men. But it was not suffi-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

cient for him to appear to be doing a service to the friend who had come to him to demand it ; he would represent to the other the steps which he was taking to effect a reconciliation as undertaken not at the request of the first friend but in the interest of the second, an attitude of the sincerity of which he had never any difficulty in convincing a listener already influenced by the idea that he saw before him the "most serviceable of men". In this fashion, playing in two scenes turn about, what in stage parlance is called "doubling" two parts, he never allowed his influence to be in the slightest degree imperilled, and the services which he rendered constituted not an expenditure of capital but a dividend upon some part of his credit. At the same time every service, seemingly rendered twice over, correspondingly enhanced his reputation as an obliging friend, and, better still, a friend whose interventions were efficacious, one who did not draw bows at a venture, whose efforts were always justified by success, as was shewn by the gratitude of both parties. This duplicity in rendering services was—allowing for disappointments such as are the lot of every human being—an important element of M. de Norpois's character. And often at the Ministry he would make use of my father, who was a simple soul, while making him believe that it was he, M. de Norpois, who was being useful to my father. •

Attracting people more easily than she wished, and having no need to proclaim her conquests abroad, Albertine kept silence with regard to the scene with myself by her bedside, which a plain girl would have wished the whole world to know. And yet of her attitude during that scene I could not arrive at any satisfactory ex-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

planation. Taking first of all the supposition that she was absolutely chaste (a supposition with which I had originally accounted for the violence with which Albertine had refused to let herself be taken in my arms and kissed, though it was by no means essential to my conception of the goodness, the fundamentally honourable character of my friend), I could not accept it without a copious revision of its terms. It ran so entirely counter to the hypothesis which I had constructed that day when I saw Albertine for the first time. Then ever so many different acts, all acts of kindness towards myself, (a kindness that was caressing, at times uneasy, alarmed, jealous of my predilection for Andrée) came up on all sides to challenge the brutal gesture with which, to escape from me, she had pulled the bell. Why then had she invited me to come and spend the evening by her bedside? Why had she spoken all the time in the language of affection? What object is there in your desire to see a friend, in your fear that he is fonder of another of your friends than of you; why seek to give him pleasure, why tell him, so romantically, that the others will never know that he has spent the evening in your room, if you refuse him so simple a pleasure and if to you it is no pleasure at all? I could not believe, all the same, that Albertine's chastity was carried to such a pitch as that, and I had begun to ask myself whether her violence might not have been due to some reason of coquetry, a disagreeable odour, for instance, which she suspected of lingering about her person, and by which she was afraid that I might be disgusted, or else of cowardice, if for instance she imagined, in her ignorance of the facts of love, that

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

my state of nervous exhaustion was due to something contagious, communicable to her in a kiss.

She was genuinely distressed by her failure to afford me pleasure, and gave me a little gold pencil-case, with that virtuous perversity which people shew who, moved by your supplications and yet not consenting to grant you what those supplications demand, are anxious all the same to bestow on you some mark of their affection ; the critic, an article from whose pen would so gratify the novelist, asks him instead to dinner ; the duchess does not take the snob with her to the theatre but lends him her box on an evening when she will not be using it herself. So far are those who do least for us, and might easily do nothing, driven by conscience to do something. I told Albertine that in giving me this pencil-case she was affording me great pleasure, and yet not so great as I should have felt if, on the night she had spent at the hotel, she had permitted me to embrace her. "It would have made me so happy ; what possible harm could it have done you ? I was simply astounded at your refusing to let me do it." "What astounds me," she retorted, "is that you should have thought it astounding. Funny sort of girls you must know if my behaviour surprises you." "I am extremely sorry if I annoyed you, but even now I cannot say that I think I was in the wrong. What I feel is that all that sort of thing is of no importance, really, and I can't understand a girl who could so easily give pleasure not consenting to do so. Let us be quite clear about it," I went on, throwing a sop of sorts to her moral scruples, as I recalled how she and her friends had scarified the girl who went about

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

with the actress Léa, "I don't mean to say for a moment that a girl can behave exactly as she likes, or that there's no such thing as immorality. Take, let me see now, yes, what you were saying the other day about a girl who is staying at Balbec and her relations with an actress ; I call that degrading, so degrading that I feel sure it must all have been made up by the girl's enemies, and that there can't be any truth in the story. It strikes me as improbable, impossible. But to let a friend kiss you, and go farther than that even—since you say that I am your friend . . ." "So you are, but I have had friends before now, I have known lots of young men who were every bit as friendly, I can assure you. There wasn't one of them would ever have dared to do a thing like that. They knew they'd get their ears boxed, if they tried it on. Besides, they never dreamed of trying, we would shake hands in an open, friendly sort of way, like good pals, but there was never a word said about kissing, and yet we weren't any the less friends for that. Why, if it's my friendship you are after, you've nothing to complain of ; I must be jolly fond of you to forgive you. But I'm sure you don't care two straws about me, really. Own up now, it's Andrée you're in love with. After all, you're quite right ; she is ever so much prettier than I am, and perfectly charming ! Oh ! You men !" Despite my recent disappointment, these words so frankly uttered, by giving me a great respect for Albertine, made a very pleasant impression on me. And perhaps this impression was to have serious and vexatious consequences for me later on, for it was round it that there began to form that feeling almost of brotherly intimacy, that moral core which was always to remain

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

at the heart of my love for Albertine. A feeling of this sort may be the cause of the keenest pain. For in order really to suffer at the hands of a woman one must have believed in her completely. For the moment, that embryo of moral esteem, of friendship, was left embedded in me like a stepping-stone in a stream. It could have availed nothing, by itself, against my happiness if it had remained there without growing, in an inertia which it was to retain the following year, and still more during the final weeks of this first visit to Balbec. It dwelt in me like one of those foreign bodies which it would be wiser when all is said to expel, but which we leave where they are without disturbing them, so harmless for the present does their weakness, their isolation amid a strange environment render them.

My dreams were now once more at liberty to concentrate on one or another of Albertine's friends, and returned first of all to Andrée, whose kindnesses might perhaps have appealed to me less strongly had I not been certain that they would come to Albertine's ears. Undoubtedly the preference that I had long been pretending to feel for Andrée had furnished me—in the habit of conversation with her, of declaring my affection—with, so to speak, the material, prepared and ready, for a love of her which had hitherto lacked only the complement of a genuine sentiment, and this my heart being once more free was now in a position to supply. But for me really to love Andrée, she was too intellectual, too neurotic, too sickly, too much like myself. If Albertine now seemed to me to be void of substance, Andrée was filled with something which I knew only too well. I had thought, that first day, that what I saw on the beach

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

there was the mistress of some racing cyclist, passionately athletic ; and now Andrée told me that if she had taken up athletic pastimes, it was under orders from her doctor, to cure her neurasthenia, her digestive troubles, but that her happiest hours were those which she spent in translating one of George Eliot's novels. The misunderstanding, due to an initial mistake as to what Andrée was, had not, as a matter of fact, the slightest importance. But my mistake was one of the kind which, if they allow love to be born, and are not recognised as mistakes until it has ceased to be under control, become a cause of suffering. Such mistakes—which may be quite different from mine with regard to Andrée, and even its exact opposite,—are frequently due (and this was especially the case here) to our paying too much attention to the aspect, the manners of what a person is not but would like to be, in forming our first impression of that person. To the outward appearance affectation, imitation, the longing to be admired, whether by the good or by the wicked, add misleading similarities of speech and gesture. There are cynicisms and cruelties which, when put to the test, prove no more genuine than certain apparent virtues and generousities. Just as we often discover a vain miser beneath the cloak of a man famed for his bountiful charity, so her flaunting of vice leads us to suppose a Messalina a respectable girl with middle-class prejudices. I had thought to find in Andrée a healthy, primitive creature, whereas she was merely a person in search of health, as were doubtless many of those in whom she herself had thought to find it, and who were in reality no more healthy than a burly arthritic with a red face and in white flannels is necessarily a Hercules. Now there are circum-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

stances in which it is not immaterial to our happiness that the person whom we have loved because of what appeared to be so healthy about her is in reality only one of those invalids who receive such health as they possess from others, as the planets borrow their light, as certain bodies are only conductors of electricity.

No matter, Andrée, like Rosemonde and Gisèle, indeed more than they, was, when all was said, a friend of Albertine, sharing her life, imitating her conduct, so closely that, the first day, I had not at once distinguished them one from another. Over these girls, flowering sprays of roses whose principal charm was that they outlined themselves against the sea, the same undivided partnership prevailed as at the time when I did not know them, when the appearance of no matter which of them had caused me such violent emotion by its announcement that the little band was not far off. And even now the sight of one of them filled me with a pleasure into which there entered, to an extent which I should not have found it easy to define, the thought of seeing the others follow her in due course, and even if they did not come that day, speaking about them, and knowing that they would be told that I had been on the beach.

It was no longer simply the attraction of those first days, it was a regular love-longing which hesitated among them all, so far was each the natural substitute for the others. My bitterest grief would not have been to be thrown over by whichever of the girls I liked best, but I should at once have liked best, because I should have fastened on to her the whole of the melancholy dream which had been floating vaguely among them all, her who had thrown me over. It would, moreover, in that event,

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

be the loss of all her friends, in whose eyes I should speedily have forfeited whatever advantage I might possess, that I should, in losing her, have unconsciously regretted, having vowed to them that sort of collective love which the politician and the actor feel for the public for whose desertion of them after they have enjoyed all its favours they can never be consoled. Even those favours which I had failed to win from Albertine I would hope suddenly to receive from one or other who had parted from me in the evening with a word or glance of ambiguous meaning, thanks to which it was to her that, for the next day or so, my desire would turn.

It strayed among them all the more voluptuously in that upon those volatile faces a comparative fixation of features had now begun, and had been carried far enough for the eye to distinguish—even if it were to change yet further—each malleable and floating effigy. To the differences that existed among them there was doubtless very little that corresponded in the no less marked differences in the length and breadth of those features, any of which might, perhaps, dissimilar as the girls appeared, almost have been lifted bodily from one face and imposed at random upon any other. But our knowledge of faces is not mathematical. In the first place, it does not begin with the measurement of the parts, it takes as its starting point an expression, a combination of the whole. In Andrée, for instance, the fineness of her gentle eyes seemed to go with the thinness of her nose, as slender as a mere curve which one could imagine as having been traced in order to produce along a single line the idea of delicacy divided higher up between the dual smile of her twin gaze. A line equally

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

fine was engraved in her hair, pliant and deep as the line with which the wind furrows the sand. And in her it must have been hereditary ; for the snow white hair of Andrée's mother was driven in the same way, forming here a swelling, there a depression like a snowdrift that rises or sinks according to the irregularities of the soil. Certainly, when compared with the fine delineation of Andrée's, Rosemonde's nose seemed to present broad surfaces, like a high tower raised upon massive foundations. Albeit expression suffices to make us believe in enormous differences between things that are separated by infinitely little—albeit that infinitely little may by itself create an expression that is absolutely unique, an individuality—it was not only the infinitely little of its lines and the originality of its expression that made each of these faces appear irreducible to terms of any other. Between my friends' faces their colouring established a separation wider still, not so much by the varied beauty of the tones with which it provided them, so contrasted that I felt when I looked at Rosemonde—flooded with a sulphurous rose colour, with the further contrast of the greenish light in her eyes—and then at Andrée—whose white cheeks received such an austere distinction from her black hair—the same kind of pleasure as if I had been looking alternately at a geranium growing by a sunlit sea and a camellia in the night ; but principally because the infinitely little differences of their lines were enlarged out of all proportion, the relations between one and another surface entirely changed by this new element of colour which, in addition to being a dispenser of tints, is great at restoring, or rather at altering dimensions. So that faces which

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

were perhaps constructed on not dissimilar lines, according as they were lighted by the flaming torch of an auburn poll or high complexion, or by the white glimmer of a dull pallor, grew sharper or broader, became something else, like those properties used in the Russian ballet, consisting sometimes, when they are seen in the light of day, of a mere disc of paper, out of which the genius of a Bakst, according to the blood-red or moonlit effect in which he plunges his stage, makes a 'hard incrustation, like a turquoise on a palace wall, or a swooning softness, as of a Bengal rose in an eastern garden. And so when acquiring a knowledge of faces we take careful measurements, but as painters, not as surveyors.

So it was with Albertine as with her friends. On certain days, slim, with grey cheeks, a sullen air, a violet transparency falling obliquely from her such as we notice sometimes on the sea, she seemed to be feeling the sorrows of exile. On other days her face, more sleek, caught and glued my desires to its varnished surface and prevented them from going any farther ; unless I caught a sudden glimpse of her from the side, for her dull cheeks, like white wax on the surface, were visibly pink beneath, which made me anxious to kiss them, to reach that different tint which thus avoided my touch. At other times happiness bathed her cheeks with a clarity so mobile that the skin, grown fluid and vague, gave passage to a sort of stealthy and subcutaneous gaze, which made it appear to be of another colour but not of another substance than her eyes ; sometimes, instinctively, when one looked at her face punctuated with tiny brown marks among which floated what were simply two larger, bluer stains, it was like looking at the egg of a

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

goldfinch—or often like an opalescent agate cut and polished in two places only, where, from the heart of the brown stone, shone like the transparent wings of a sky-blue butterfly her eyes, those features in which the flesh becomes a mirror and gives us the illusion that it allows us, more than through the other parts of the body, to approach the soul. But most often of all she shewed more colour, and was then more animated ; sometimes the only pink thing in her white face was the tip of her nose, as finely pointed as that of a mischievous kitten with which one would have liked to stop and play ; sometimes her cheeks were so glossy that one's glance slipped, as over the surface of a miniature, over their pink enamel, which was made to appear still more delicate, more private, by the enclosing though half-opened case of her black hair ; or it might happen that the tint of her cheeks had deepened to the violet shade of the red cyclamen, and, at times, even, when she was flushed or feverish, with a suggestion of unhealthiness which lowered my desire to something more sensual and made her glance expressive of something more perverse and unwholesome, to the deep purple of certain roses, a red that was almost black ; and each of these Albertines was different, as in every fresh appearance of the dancer whose colours, form, character, are transmuted according to the innumerably varied play of a projected 'lime-light. It was perhaps because they were so different, the persons whom I used to contemplate, in her at this period, that later on I became myself a different person, corresponding to the particular Albertine to whom my thoughts had turned ; a jealous, an indifferent, a voluptuous, a melancholy, a frenzied person, created anew not

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

merely by the accident of what memory had risen to the surface, but in proportion also to the strength of the belief that was lent to the support of one and the same memory by the varying manner in which I appreciated it. For this is the point to which we must always return, to these beliefs with which most of the time we are quite unconsciously filled, but which for all that are of more importance to our happiness than is the average person whom we see, for it is through them that we see him, it is they that impart his momentary greatness to the person seen. To be quite accurate I ought to give a different name to each of the 'me's' who were to think about Albertine in time to come; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like—called by me simply and for the sake of convenience "the sea"—those seas that succeeded one another on the beach, in front of which, a nymph likewise, she stood apart. But above all, in the same way as, in telling a story (though to far greater purpose here), one mentions what the weather was like on such and such a day, I ought always to give its name to the belief that, on any given day on which I saw Albertine, was reigning in my soul, creating its atmosphere, the appearance of people like that of seas being dependent on those clouds, themselves barely visible, which change the colour of everything by their concentration, their mobility, their dissemination, their flight—like that cloud which Elstir had rent one evening by not introducing me to these girls, with whom he had stopped to talk, whereupon their forms, as they moved away, had suddenly increased in beauty—a cloud that had formed again a few days later when I did get to

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

know the girls, veiling their brightness, interposing itself frequently between my eyes and them, opaque and soft, like Virgil's *Leucothea*.

No doubt, all their faces had assumed quite new meanings for me since the manner in which they were to be read had been to some extent indicated to me by their talk, talk to which I could ascribe a value all the greater in that, by questioning them, I could prompt it whenever I chose, could vary it like an experimenter who seeks by corroborative proofs to establish the truth of his theory. And it is, after all, as good a way as any of solving the problem of existence to approach near enough to the things that have appeared to us from a distance to be beautiful and mysterious, to be able to satisfy ourselves that they have neither mystery nor beauty. It is one of the systems of hygiene among which we are at liberty to choose our own, a system which is perhaps not to be recommended too strongly, but it gives us a certain tranquillity with which to spend what remains of life, and also—since it enables us to regret nothing, by assuring us that we have attained to the best, and that the best was nothing out of the common—with which to resign ourselves to death.

I had now substituted, in the brains of these girls, for their supposed contempt for chastity, their memories of daily "incidents", honest principles, liable, it might be, to relaxation, but principles which had hitherto kept unscathed the children who had acquired them in their own respectable homes. And yet, when one has been mistaken from the start, even in trifling details, when an error of assumption or recollection makes one seek for the author of a malicious slander, or for the place where

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

one has lost something, in the wrong direction, it frequently happens that one discovers one's error only to substitute for it not the truth but a fresh error. I drew, so far as their manner of life and the proper way to behave with them went, all the possible conclusions from the word "Innocence" which I had read, in talking familiarly with them, upon their faces. But perhaps I had been reading carelessly, with the inaccuracy born of a too rapid deciphering, and it was no more written there than was the name of Jules Ferry on the programme of the performance at which I had heard Berma for the first time, an omission which had not prevented me from maintaining to M. de Norpois that Jules Ferry, beyond any possibility of doubt, was a person who wrote curtain-raisers.

No matter which it might be of my friends of the little band, was not inevitably the face that I had last seen the only face that I could recall, since, of our memories with respect to a person, the mind eliminates everything that does not agree with our immediate purpose of our daily relations (especially if those relations are quickened with an element of love which, ever unsatisfied, lives always in the moment that is about to come)? That purpose allows the chain of spent days to slip away, holding on only to the very end of it, often of a quite different metal from the links that have vanished in the night, and in the journey which we make through life, counts as real only in the place in which we at any given moment are. But all those earliest impressions, already so remote, could not find, against the blunting process that assailed them day after day, any remedy in my memory; during the long hours which I spent in talk-

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

ing, eating, playing with these girls, I did not remember even that they were the same ruthless, sensual virgins whom I had seen, as in a fresco, file past between me and the sea.

Geographers, archaeologists may conduct us over Calypso's island, may excavate the Palace of Minos. Only Calypso becomes then nothing more than a woman, Minos than a king with no semblance of divinity. Even the good and bad qualities which history teaches us to have been the attributes of those quite real personages, often differ widely from those which we had ascribed to the fabulous beings who bore the same names as they. Thus had there faded and vanished all the lovely mythology of Ocean which I had composed in those first days. But it is not altogether immaterial that we do succeed, at any rate now and then, in spending our time in familiar intercourse with what we have thought to be unattainable and have longed to possess. In our later dealings with people whom at first we found disagreeable there persists always, even among the artificial pleasure which we have come at length to enjoy in their society, the lingering taint of the defects which they have succeeded in hiding. But, in relations such as I was now having with Albertine and her friends, the genuine pleasure which was there at the start leaves that fragrance which no amount of skill can impart to hot-house fruits, to grapes that have not ripened in the sun. The supernatural creatures which for a little time they had been to me still introduced, even without any intention on my part, a miraculous element into the most common-place dealings that I might have with them, or rather prevented such dealings from ever becoming com-

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

monplace at all. My desire had sought so ardently to learn the significance of the eyes which now knew and smiled to see me, but whose glances on the first day had crossed mine like rays from another universe ; it had distributed so generously, so carefully, so minutely, colour and fragrance over the carnation surfaces of these girls who now, outstretched on the cliff-top, were simply offering me sandwiches or guessing riddles, that often, in the afternoon, while I lay there among them, like those painters who seek to match the grandeurs of antiquity in modern life, give to a woman cutting her toe-nail the nobility of the *Spinario*, or, like Rubens, make goddesses out of women whom they know, to people some mythological scene ; at those lovely forms, dark and fair, so dissimilar in type, scattered around me in the grass, I would gaze without emptying them, perhaps, of all the mediocre contents with which my every day experience had filled them, and at the same time without expressly recalling their heavenly origin, as if, like young Hercules or young Telemachus, I had been set to play amid a band of nymphs.

Then the concerts ended, the bad weather began, my friends left Balbec ; not all at once, like the swallows, but all in the same week. Albertine was the first to go, abruptly, without any of her friends understanding, then or afterwards, why she had returned suddenly to Paris whither neither her work nor any amusement summoned her. "She said neither why nor wherefore, and with that she left !" muttered François, who, for that matter, would have liked us to leave as well. We were, she thought, inconsiderate towards the staff, now greatly reduced in number, but retained on account of the few

●WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

visitors who were still staying on, and towards the manager who was "just eating up money." It was true that the hotel, which would very soon be closed for the winter, had long since seen most of its patrons depart, but never had it been so attractive. This view was not shared by the manager ; from end to end of the rooms in which we sat shivering, and at the doors of which no page now stood on guard, he paced the corridors, wearing a new frock coat, so well tended by the hairdresser that his insipid face appeared to be made of some composition in which, for one part of flesh, there were three of cosmetics, incessantly changing his neckties. (These refinements cost less than having the place heated and keeping on the staff, just as a man who is no longer able to subscribe ten thousand francs to a charity can still parade his generosity without inconvenience to himself by tipping the boy who brings him a telegram with five.) He appeared to be inspecting the empty air, to be seeking to give, by the smartness of his personal appearance, a provisional splendour to the desolation that could now be felt in this hotel where the season had not been good, and walked like the ghost of a monarch who returns to haunt the ruins of what was once his palace. He was particularly annoyed when the little local railway company, finding the supply of passengers inadequate, discontinued its trains until the following spring. "What is lacking here," said the manager, "is the means of commotion." In spite of the deficit which his books shewed, he was making plans for the future on a lavish scale. And as he was, after all, capable of retaining an exact memory of fine language when it was directly applicable to the hotel-keeping industry and had the effect

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

of enhancing its importance : " I was not adequately supported, although in the dining room I had an efficient squad," he explained ; " but the pages left something to be desired. You will see, next year, what a phalanx I shall collect." In the meantime the suspension of the services of the B. C. B. obliged him to send for letters and occasionally to dispatch visitors in a light cart. I would often ask leave to sit by the driver, and in this way I managed to be out in all weathers, as in the winter that I had spent at Combray.

Sometimes, however, the driving rain kept my grandmother and me, the Casino being closed, in rooms almost completely deserted, as in the lowest hold of a ship when a storm is raging ; and there, day by day, as in the course of a sea-voyage, a new person from among those in whose company we had spent three months without getting to know them, the chief magistrate from Caen, the leader of the Cherbourg bar, an American lady and her daughters, came up to us, started conversation, discovered some way of making the time pass less slowly, revealed some social accomplishment, taught us a new game, invited us to drink tea or to listen to music, to meet them at a certain hour, to plan together some of those diversions which contain the true secret of pleasure-giving, which is to aim not at giving pleasure but simply at helping us to pass the time of our boredom, in a word, formed with us, at the end of our stay at Balbec, ties of friendship which, in a day or two, their successive departures from the place would sever. I even made the acquaintance of the rich young man, of one of his pair of aristocratic friends and of the actress, who had reappeared for a few days ; but their little society was com-

1 WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE

posed now of three persons only, the other friend having returned to Paris. They asked me to come out to dinner with them at their restaurant. I think, they were just as well pleased that I did not accept. But they had given the invitation in the most friendly way imaginable, and albeit it came actually from the rich young man, since the others were only his guests, as the friend who was staying with him, the Marquis Maurice de Vaudémont, came of a very good family indeed, instinctively the actress, in asking me whether I would not come, said, to flatter my vanity: "Maurice will be so pleased."

And when in the hall of the hotel I met them all three together, it was M. de Vaudémont (the rich young man effacing himself) who said to me: "Won't you give us the pleasure of dining with us?"

On the whole I had derived very little benefit from Balbec, but this only strengthened my desire to return there. It seemed to me that I had not stayed there long enough. This was not what my friends at home were thinking, who wrote to ask whether I meant to stay there for the rest of my life. And when I saw that it was the name "Balbec" which they were obliged to put on the envelope—just as my window looked out not over a landscape or a street but on to the plains of the sea, as I heard through the night its murmur to which I had before going to sleep entrusted my ship of dreams, I had the illusion that this life of promiscuity with the waves must effectively, without my knowledge, pervade me with the notion of their charm, like those lessons which one learns by heart while one is asleep.

The manager offered to reserve better rooms for me

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

be spraying its foam over echoes of a submarine music. I grew impatient because no one had yet come with my things, so that I might rise and dress. Twelve o'clock struck, Françoise arrived at last. And for months on end, in this Balbec to which I had so looked forward because I imagined it only as battered by the storm and buried in fogs, the weather had been so dazzling and so unchanging that when she came to open the window I could always, without once being wrong, expect to see the same patch of sunlight folded in the corner of the outer wall, of an unalterable colour which was less moving as a sign of summer than depressing as the colour of a lifeless and composed enamel. And after Françoise had removed her pins from the mouldings of the window-frame, taken down her various cloths, and drawn back the curtains, the summer day which she disclosed seemed as dead, as immemorially ancient as would have been a sumptuously attired dynastic mummy from which our old servant had done no more than precautionally unwind the linen wrappings before displaying it to my gaze, embalmed in its vesture of gold.

THE END

